

AFRICA SOUTHEAST LOCAL PAGES

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

Her Unwavering Faith and Prayers Made Them Whole

By Elder Hesbon O. Usi, Area Seventy

As a branch president many years ago my attention was drawn to a family who were baptized comprising a father, mother and two children. Both husband and wife became enthusiastic about their newfound religion. Together with Relief Society and elders quorum we embraced and integrated this family into Church activities.

Soon after his ordination to the Aaronic Priesthood, the husband was given a calling as assistant librarian and the wife was called as a teacher in the Primary (nursery class). They lived a simple life, barely managing to provide the basic needs for the family, but seemed happy all the time. Over a period of time I noticed that the husband started to miss the Church Sunday meetings. This was a little disappointing since the elders quorum president was preparing him to be ordained an elder.

During this time I also noticed that the wife was struggling to come to church with her young children, sometimes arriving late for sacrament meeting. After two visits to their home together with members of the elders quorum,

I noticed that the husband was not keen on coming back to church. I became concerned. On our third visit, I learned that the husband was struggling to overcome an addiction from his old lifestyle before baptism.

The Lord's Blessings Come to Those Who Keep His Commandments

One Sunday after sacrament meeting I was prompted to call the wife for a brief interview. As we talked I realized her conviction to the gospel and that she was determined to raise her young family in the Church despite the challenges they were facing as a family.

She said to me, "President, I have observed the general life pattern of young people in the place we live and noticed that as soon as they become teenagers they drop out of high school and engage in vice and other acts of lawlessness. I have realized that there is not much I can do to change our living condition. The only hope I have is in the Church. I will try to help my children learn the gospel values while they are young and



*Elder
Hesbon O. Usi*

remain committed to live the principles of the gospel as they grow even with little or no support from my husband."

In response to her sentiments I gave her an assurance that the Lord is ready to bless those who seek after Him

if they repent of their sins and follow His teachings. I decided to change the brief interview into a teaching moment and shared the scriptures on topics that would strengthen her faith.

Quoting from Isaiah about the law of the fast, as enjoined with the Sabbath: "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

"Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

“And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday:

“And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not” (Isaiah 58:7–11).

The Lord’s blessings will come to those who keep His commandments. Attending sacrament meeting alone without engaging ourselves in living the gospel in its entirety cannot bring a reward to those who have been received into His Church through baptism. I emphasized to her that even as she may have good desires for her children, she had to be first converted to the gospel, and then the children will follow her example and be ready to live the commandments. Her desires would be achieved through a period of time. If she endured the challenges of times with faith and diligence, she would realise the effects of the gospel on her life and that of her children.

The Lord shall give to those who are willing to learn. “Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line

upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isaiah 28:9–10).

The good influence of a faithful mother and the unique God-given gift of nurturing can mold the characters of young children in the home. If joined by fathers in this great effort, the results can be tremendous. The children will have no doubt or fear as they face the future. Both parents become primary models to their children as they grow in love and unity in the gospel.

Mothers’ Influence on Their Sons

The Book of Mormon attests to this fact in the story of the young men of Ammon who were taught well in the home by their mothers and blessed by many provisions from their fathers. They had no fear of death. They valued the liberty of their people more highly than their own lives, because they had learned to get rid of doubt and have faith in God. The unwavering testimonies of their mothers burned deeply into their hearts and gave them victory.

“Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (Alma 56:47).

In his book *Stand a Little Taller* [2001], President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) stated,

“Mothers and fathers, do the best you can, and remember that the greatest responsibilities you have in this world are those children whom you have brought into the world and for whose nurture and care you are responsible.”

In the Old Testament we read of a faithful woman called Hannah who was the wife of Elkanah. She lived many years without having a child, because the Lord shut up her womb. Despite the love her husband gave to her she was sore in her heart because she did not bear a child. Each year she accompanied her husband to the temple to offer sacrifices unto the Lord.

While at the temple in one of their visits Hannah was noticed by the priest (Eli) as she prayed unto God for a child. “Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou has asked of him” (1 Samuel 1:17.) Soon afterwards the Lord remembered Hannah and she conceived and “bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:20).

“And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh: and the child was young. . . .

“And she said, O my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord.

“For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him:

“Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there” (1 Samuel 1:24, 26–28).

Because of his mother’s faith, prayer and vow she made to the Lord, Samuel grew and was in favour both with the Lord and also

with men, and was latter recognized as a prophet by Israel.

A Faithful Mother’s Influence Today

As I monitored the life and progress of this family in the Church, her commitment and endurance bore fruits when her first son was called to serve a full-time mission. Soon thereafter I had the privilege as a stake president to

set apart her second son, who was called on a mission too. Both, having served honourable missions, are now men of integrity and married with families. They have met the desires of their faithful mother.

This I know to be true, and that God blesses those who come unto Him with humility and are willing to live His gospel. In the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, amen. ■

LOCAL NEWS

Africa Southeast Area Presidency Is Reorganized

The Africa Southeast Area Presidency was reorganized effective January 6, 2013. Elder Ulisses Soares now serves as one of the Presidency of the Seventy (see D&C 107:93–95). Therefore he was released as the First Counsellor in the Africa Southeast Area Presidency. Elder Carl B. Cook, previously Second Counsellor in the Area Presidency, now serves as First Counsellor. Elder Colin H. Bricknell, formerly an Area Seventy, is now Second Counsellor in the Area Presidency.



Elder Dale G. Renlund

Elder Dale G. Renlund, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, continues as President of the Africa Southeast Area. He served as a counsellor in the Area Presidency from

2009 until his call as President in 2011. Elder Renlund is married to Ruth Lybbert. They have one daughter.

Elder Ulisses Soares

Elder Soares speaks fluent French and English in addition to his native Portuguese. He has been a

highly effective and beloved member of the presidency since his arrival in Africa in July 2011. Elder Soares will be an advocate for Africa wherever he serves. Thanks are extended to Elder Soares, his wife, Rosana, and daughter Natalia for the service they have given in Africa during the past 18 months.

Elder Carl B. Cook

Elder Carl B. Cook was called to the First Quorum of the Seventy in April 2011. He served as Second Counsellor in the Africa Southeast Area from July 2011 until this call to serve as First Counsellor in January 2013. Elder Cook is a capable, soft-spoken leader. He is married to Lynette Hansen. They have five children.

Elder Colin H. Bricknell

Elder Colin H. Bricknell was called to the Third Quorum of the Seventy in April 2008. Among previous callings, he served as president of the Idaho Pocatello Mission, stake president and





counsellor, bishop and counsellor, counsellor in the MTC presidency, institute teacher, and other teaching and leadership positions.

Elder Bricknell studied at Durban Technical College

and owned an electrical contracting business. He worked as a real estate manager for the Africa Southeast Area of the Church prior to his retirement in 2012. He is married to Elizabeth Fitchet. They are the parents of five children. ■

African Continent Stake Conference Is Held

A remarkable unity fell over Africa as conferences were held in 66 stakes and 59 districts throughout the continent on Sunday, November 18, 2012. The proceedings, which originated in the Conference Centre in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, were broadcast to congregations via DVD in Amharic, Lingala, English, French, Portuguese, Malagasy, and Swahili.

Church President Thomas S. Monson, Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Elder Craig A. Cardon of the Seventy, and Mary N. Cook of the Young Women general presidency spoke in the conference.

President Monson encouraged members to join the ranks of the “fishers of men”. Many feel isolation’s despair—especially the elderly. Home teachers and visiting teachers must first be a sincere friend to those whom they teach. President Monson also invited each to reach out to the aged, the less-active, the handicapped, and to all who are in need. He reminded members that love is the binding balm and language of the heart.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson dedicated the country of Angola in 2010. He urged those

attending the stake conference to respond to four of the teachings of President Thomas S. Monson:

1. Serve as a missionary. He especially encouraged couples to work to find a way to serve a mission as a couple.
2. Rescue those who have strayed from the safety of the gospel.
3. Marry and raise a family. Education and work will never be as important as marriage and family.
4. Church and family must unite to strengthen youth.

Elder Craig A. Cardon, formerly a member of the Africa West Area Presidency for five years, drew upon his experiences in Africa. He told of a meeting in a humble facility in Africa.

A two-year-old boy kept busy during the meeting gathering one hymnbook at a time and stacking it on the podium. He had to reach higher with each added book. Finally the teetering stack was too tall as he stretched to add yet another book. The toddler’s father then came from the congregation and lifted him up to place the book on the stack.

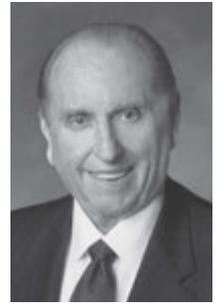
Elder Cardon concluded that when you have done all you can do, Heavenly Father will lift you up to do one more thing.

Mary N. Cook of the Young Women general presidency based her remarks on the theme, “Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations” (D&C 115:5). The light of the gospel brings hope to everyone.

She encouraged the young women and all attending the conferences to do four things every day:

1. Pray.
2. Read the scriptures—especially the Book of Mormon.
3. Obey the commandments.
4. Smile.

Elder Cardon conducted the prerecorded meeting. Each stake and district held individual



**President
Thomas S.
Monson**



**Elder D. Todd
Christofferson**



**Elder Craig A.
Cardon**



Mary N. Cook

leadership and adult conference sessions on Saturday, November 17, 2012. Sunday's opening and closing hymns and prayers,

as well as stake and district business, were conducted prior to and following the DVD presentation. ■

First Stake Created in Botswana

By Ruth L. Renlund

Saints in Botswana rejoiced as the first stake was created in their country, the Gaborone Botswana Stake. Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Seventy, a member of the Africa Southeast Area Presidency, along with Elder Colin H. Bricknell and Elder T. Jackson Mkhabela, then both Area Seventies, organized the stake on November 4, 2012.

The stake was created with units from the Roodeport South Africa Stake and consists of eight wards or branches. Other boundary changes were also made to the Roodeport South Africa Stake and Soweto South Africa Stake.

President Clement Matswagothata, age 32, was

called as the first president of the new stake. Geoffrey Tembo, first counsellor, and O. Shaka Mokweni, second counsellor, complete the stake presidency.

Over 1800 people attended the two Sunday general sessions in which the changes were presented and sustained. Members gathered in Gaborone, Botswana, as well as in Roodeport, South Africa.

Elder Renlund reminded the congregation of a special blessing the country received 20 years ago when Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles dedicated Botswana for the preaching of the gospel. In that dedicatory prayer, Elder

PHOTOGRAPH BY RUTH L. RENLUND



*President
Clement M.
Matswagothata,
president of
the Gaborone
Botswana Stake
—the first stake
in Botswana.*

Scott blessed the Saints, present and future, that as they kept the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ, they would have a leavening influence on all the people of Botswana. Elder Renlund remarked, "If you want to be a true Botswana patriot, keep the commandments of God." He further observed, "The organisation of this stake is evidence of that blessing. Scattered Israel is being gathered." ■

Left to right: Elder Dale G. Renlund, President Geoffrey Tembo, President Clement Matswagothata, President O. Shaka Mokweni, and Elder Colin Bricknell.

Members of the new Gaborone Botswana Stake gather for this long-awaited event.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RUTH L. RENLUND



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Wives of General Authorities Meet with Women in South Africa and Democratic Republic of Congo

How Do You Receive the Holy Ghost in Your Life?

This was the first thought-provoking question in a Women's Meeting considering "The Role of the Holy Ghost in Our Lives, and Personal Revelation." During the meeting, which was held in the South Africa Johannesburg Stake Centre, a panel comprising wives¹ of General Authorities and other Church leaders considered answers to the questions. Members of the congregation were also invited to participate.

Kathy Clayton summarized the answer to the first question in three action words: "Ask. Listen. Act." Ask in prayer. Listen for an answer. Act upon the answer. Five more questions were posed and discussed.

How Does the Holy Ghost Direct You?

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was quoted as saying, "The Holy Ghost speaks to you in short, clipped directives . . . with no explanation."

Lynette Cook described receiving "a compelling feeling to do something." She likened that feeling to Nephi's statement, "The Lord

commanded me, and I must obey" (2 Nephi 33:15).

Ruth Renlund said she experiences "a brilliant clear thought of what to do or say."

What Role Does Prayer Play in Receiving the Holy Ghost?

Dorah Mkhabela felt "confused" when her husband was called as an Area Seventy in 2010. She knelt in prayer and felt "a warm, comfortable feeling that if I live worthily it will be OK. When you don't pray, you won't be prompted by the Holy Ghost."

Sister Clayton pointed out that "the Holy Ghost speaks to each in the language she will understand. The Holy Ghost can customize information for each personally."

What Can We Do to Ensure Being Worthy to Have the Holy Ghost in Our Lives?

Kathy Omer, wife of Johannesburg Mission president S. Craig Omer, counsels the missionaries that they "constantly need to be worthy to receive the Spirit."



Ruth Renlund, Rosana Soares, Kathy Clayton, and Lynette Cook arrive at the Women's Meeting in Johannesburg.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SISTER EDY HOWES



A sister in the congregation commented that she feels the Spirit more “when I arise early and don’t allow my mind to be drawn into things of the world.”

Another sister commented that she feels “the influence of the spirit of others to help me live correctly.”

How Does the Holy Ghost Help in Family Life?

Jennifer Bricknell is the mother of five children, three of whom now live in the United States with their families. She explained that each of those children “fasted as a family and went to the temple before making the decision to move.”

What Is the Role of the Temple in Personal Revelation?

Muriel Armstrong, matron of the Johannesburg Temple and wife of temple president Kenneth S.

Armstrong, stated that “the Holy Ghost is the teacher at the temple. As one sits in the temple celestial room, prays and waits for personal revelation, the answers come. The Holy Ghost teaches, inspires and reveals in the temple—He comes from above.”

Personal Testimonies

Sister Cook said, “The Holy Ghost conveys the love of the Saviour to my heart.”

Rosana Soares told of a time when as a young mother she became frustrated with her bickering children. She retreated to her room and picked up her scriptures, which “happened” to open to Doctrine and Covenants 31:9, “Be patient in afflictions, revile not against those that revile. Govern your house in meekness, and be steadfast.” Sister

Senior missionary sisters gather following the meeting in Johannesburg.



Sisters in the DRC greet Kathy Clayton following the Women’s Meeting in Kinshasa.



Sisters mingle at the Johannesburg Stake Centre following the Women's Meeting.

Soares returned to her children and apologized. "The sweet Spirit of the Lord was in my home for the rest of the day," she said.

Sister Renlund said she has had a "front row seat to miracles. One by one, heart by heart is

being turned to Jesus Christ through the Holy Ghost. God cares about us enough to give us the Holy Ghost."

Sister Clayton concluded that "women feel of the Spirit, and it spills over. We women see and influence each other. . . . May you press on with the love of God and the Holy Ghost."

Over 600 sisters attended the Women's Meeting, which was held on Saturday, October 20, 2012, in the South Africa Johannesburg Stake Centre in Sandton. The spirit in the meeting reflected the theme concerning the Holy Ghost.

A similar meeting was held in the Kinshasa D.R. Congo Stake Centre on Saturday, October 27, 2012. ■

NOTE

1. Those attending were Kathy Clayton, wife of Elder L. Whitney Clayton; Ruth L. Renlund, wife of Elder Dale G. Renlund; Rosana Soares, wife of Elder Ulisses Soares; and Lynette B. Cook, wife of Elder Carl B. Cook. Elders Clayton, Renlund, Soares, and Cook are members of the Seventy.

Gary L. Packer, Former President of the DRC Lubumbashi Mission, Passes Away

Gary L. Packer, released in July 2012 as mission president in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Lubumbashi Mission, passed away on Friday, November 23, 2012, in Utah.

Brother Packer served two missions in South Africa with Sister Packer, and was then called as the first mission president of the newly formed DRC Lubumbashi Mission.

In a June 2012 farewell article on the Africa Southeast Area website, President and Sister Paula Packer said "Till we meet again. . . . We can't say that we

will not return to Africa. We have spent nearly six years here. Africa is now part of us and

we hope that our presence has helped in some way to build 'the kingdom' here." ■



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF GARY L. PACKER FAMILY

Paula Packer and then-mission president Gary L. Packer in Burundi in December 2011.