

AFRICA WEST AREA LOCAL PAGES

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

The Growth of the Church in West Africa

By **Elder Terence M. Vinson**

President, Africa West Area Presidency

Having lived in West Africa now for almost five years, I am still amazed at the growth of the Church here. My wife, Kay, and I arrived in July 2013, just after Elder Joseph W. Sitati had created the Warri Nigeria Stake earlier that same month and prior to his departure from West Africa. I was impressed and surprised at how quickly the Church had grown from the first stake in West Africa in May 1988 to this Warri Nigeria Stake,

the 38th in West Africa just 25 years after the first. Although the Church then had a presence in seven countries of West Africa, there were stakes in only four of those seven countries.

But I had no concept of the acceleration that was about to come. As at the end of December 2017, there are now three more countries (Senegal, Guinea, and Mali) where branches of the Church have been formed, bringing to 10 the number of countries with

a Church presence within West Africa. And 7 of those 10 countries are contributors to the total of 96 stakes now in West Africa.

The 100th stake of the Church in the Africa West Area will be created just 30 years after the first.

This growth has been phenomenal, but it is not the most important measure of the strength of the Church. As we know, the Church does not consist of buildings and infrastructure; rather,



Elder Terence M. Vinson



Elder and Sister Bednar with the first two missionaries from Senegal

it consists of members committed to living the gospel and keeping their covenants, as taught by Moroni:

“And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful into prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and finisher of their faith.

“And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.

“And they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus” (Moroni 6:4–6).

Both the growth, and the strength, of the Church in West Africa lies in the hearts and souls of the members. There is great faith and love for God, and there is love and concern for one’s neighbour. In fact, it is no surprise that the strength of the Church here is based on the two “great commandments” (see Matthew 22:37–40). The people of West Africa, in general, love God, and they love their neighbour.

Another key to the growth and strengthening of the Church here is that many young men and young

women have responded to President Thomas S. Monson’s call, as clearly given by him in October 2010:

“First, to young men of the Aaronic Priesthood and to you young men who are becoming elders: I repeat what prophets have long taught—that every worthy, able young man should prepare to serve a mission. Missionary service is a priesthood duty—an obligation the Lord expects of us who have been given so very much. Young men, I admonish you to prepare for service as a missionary. Keep yourselves clean and pure and worthy to represent the Lord. Maintain your health and strength. Study the scriptures. Where such is available, participate in seminary or institute. Familiarize yourself with the missionary handbook *Preach My Gospel*.

“A word to you young sisters: while you do not have the same priesthood responsibility as do the young men to serve as full-time missionaries, you also make a valuable contribution as missionaries, and we welcome your service.”¹

This has not only provided a force of missionaries led by the Spirit, but it has also provided wards and branches with young but mature men and women of quality and experience beyond their years, to add to the strength of those wards and branches and of the stakes and districts. We are only limited by the number of those responding to the Lord’s call through

His prophet, to be prepared and to serve missions.

We see that cycle now beginning in Dakar, Senegal. The first two missionaries to be called as missionaries from that country, Elders Batoumeni and Ngoudiabantou, travelled from the missionary training center to their missions in early November 2017, one to the Ghana Accra West Mission and the other to the Ghana Kumasi Mission. They will return in two years, experienced in matters of the Spirit and with great maturity, to provide increased strength to the growing Church in Dakar, Senegal.

Especially limiting is the lack of sister missionaries. Most mission presidents want more sister missionaries, as they are so productive and effective both in finding and teaching and in adding a different, and needed, perspective to the work. In West Africa, only African sisters are permitted to serve. So our missions are in need of more sisters to be prepared and willing to do so. We invite all worthy young men to fulfill their responsibility to be prepared and to serve a mission, and we welcome just as strongly all worthy young women who may be considering serving to do the same.

This is part of the gathering of the children of Israel. It seems to me that the blood of Israel flows strongly in the veins of West Africans. The gathering will only occur as we all assist in that process of inviting souls unto Christ.



The Lord wants to gather His children “as a hen gathereth her chickens,” He said four times in 3 Nephi 10:4–6. His efforts to gather depend on our efforts to be His hands.

An article by Philip Allred, which appeared in *Meridian Magazine* some years ago, better describes this analogy and its reference to the Saviour’s atoning sacrifice, as follows.

“A few years ago, a colleague of mine at Idaho State University related one of his student’s experiences that help illustrate this mother hen symbolism. The student, a young man, had been helping inspect some fire damage just outside of town from a recent blaze. As he and the other

volunteers were assisting one of the inspectors, they noticed several smoldering mounds across the scorched earth. Intrigued, he asked the inspector what these were.

“The inspector replied that he should kick one of the piles. He did. To his great surprise several baby Sage Grouse chicks ran out from under the upturned mound. He was fascinated. How ingenious he thought, these little chicks had known to run underneath this refuge. The young man asked the inspector how the chicks knew about this natural shelter.

“To his amazement, the inspector replied that they were not natural at all; instead this smouldering heap was

none other than the remains of their mother. The inspector continued to explain that when a fire breaks out the mother hen calls out to her young ones and stretches out her arm so that they can run inside to her protective embrace.”²

Can you see the similarity of this example to what the Saviour has done for you and me? What can we do for Him?

We again invite all to consider and ACT upon the Lord’s counsel given previously: “And if any man among you be strong in the Spirit, let him take with him him that is weak, that he may be edified in all meekness, that he may become strong also. . . .

“Behold, this is the way that mine apostles, in ancient days, built up my church unto me” (D&C 84:106, 108).

This invitation is to adults, married or single, and to youth and children. None are exempt from this opportunity and responsibility that we have taken upon ourselves in our baptismal covenants. Are we willing to do as we have covenanted—to bear one another’s burdens, to mourn with those that mourn, to comfort those needing comfort, to stand as witnesses of God always in both word and actions? Are we willing to eject pride and a sense of entitlement from our lives and to embrace and teach the principle of true integrity?

If the answers are yes, who will you take and to what will you take them? Will you take them to the sacrament service, to the temple, to the missionaries, or to your home to study the scriptures or to understand real integrity with you? Let us help our Redeemer gather His chickens in West Africa, a land of faith, kindness, and love. That will truly grow the Church, as the vehicle for administering the ordinances, to be strong. It will also grow the Church, as the combination of all the Latter-day Saints in West Africa, to be strong, sure, and united. ■

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “As We Meet Together Again,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 5–6.
2. Philip Allred, “Lesson 37: ‘Whosoever Will Come, Him Will I Receive;’ 3 Nephi 8–11,” *Meridian Magazine*, Sept. 20, 2016, ldsomag.com.

Latter-day Saints Experience Unprecedented Growth in Africa: Membership Increases by Hundreds

Adapted from Mormon Newsroom



Africa West Area President Elder Terence M. Vinson greets friends in Liberia Stake conference.

Membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues to grow at an unprecedented rate throughout West Africa. Elder Terence M. Vinson, President of the Africa West Area, said, “The reason why the Church is growing so quickly here in Africa is due to a spirituality amongst the people. You cannot help but love the people of West Africa, their hearts

are pure and they are open to spiritual things.”

The groundbreaking growth in the Africa West Area may be unprecedented in the history of the Church’s growth in modern times. During the last quarter of the year, three new stakes were created on successive weekends in West Africa.

“Creating three stakes in one area of the Church is a very rare event,” said

Elder Vinson, “or at least it has been until now. These nine new stakes, created within less than two months, bring to 18 the total number of new stakes organized in Africa West during 2017.”

Elder Vinson said, “This growth brings the gospel closer to the people. It helps them to grow through knowledge and experience, as they are called upon to assume roles that were previously filled by mission leaders or others. Members often feel inadequate to fulfil their new responsibilities, but as they “act in faith,” they feel firsthand the help of the Lord in their lives. They can then testify to their family members and neighbors of the reality of God’s power in our lives.”

Leadership positions throughout The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are filled from the ranks of the membership of the Church. Both men and women are asked to assume leadership roles in specific organizations of the Church. No one is paid for their ministry. This pattern follows the example shown by Jesus Christ in the Church He established during His ministry on this earth.

On October 22, 2017, the following three stakes were created:

- Daloa Cote d’Ivoire Stake
- Lomé Togo Tokoin Stake
- Abomosu Ghana Stake

Two more were established on November 11: Bo Sierra Leone



Latter-day Saints in Liberia raise a hand in sustaining the leaders in the newly created Liberia stakes.



Latter-day Saints from Abomosu, Ghana, gather outside conference meeting.

North and Bo Sierra Leone West Stakes.

December 3, 2017, saw the organization of three more stakes:

- Calabar Nigeria North Stake
- Freetown Sierra Leone East Stake
- Abidjan Niangon Center Stake

On December 10, 2017, Elder Marcus B. Nash, First Counselor in the Africa West Area, oversaw the creation of the Asamankese Ghana

Stake. Elder Terence M. Vinson presided when the Caldwell Liberia Stake and Paynesville Liberia Stakes were created that same day.

President Douglas A. Clark, president of the Liberia Monrovia Mission, said, “I am delighted to be part of the wonderful growth of the Church in Liberia. Over 90 percent of the 11,000 Church members in Liberia now live in one of the four stakes in the



Young men and women serving as leaders in the Liberia Monrovia Mission meet with Elder Terence M. Vinson for instruction.



A family gathers for conference in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

capitol city of Monrovia. This growth is absolutely phenomenal, considering not one of these stakes existed 13 months ago.”

President Clark continued, “Much of our mission’s effort will continue in these stakes as we partner with them to share the gospel

with their friends and neighbors,” he said. “Having these stakes in place enables us to take the gospel to new areas beyond Monrovia for the first time in 10 years, fulfilling the Lord’s admonition to ‘strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders’ [Moroni 10:31].” ■

LATTER-DAY VOICES

I Want to Visit the Latter-day Saints’ Church Again!

By Vincent Twum

Assin Achiasse Ward, Assin Fosu Ghana Stake

Life was so hard for me after I lost my father when I was eight years old. It wasn’t easy being with my mum and two younger siblings whom I had to sacrifice my time and strength to help raise them in a Christlike way. I was born to a Christian family who loved God and always desired to serve Him. After the death of my father, we had to move to my mother’s family, where we continued with life. It wasn’t easy—there were trials, challenges, sickness, hunger, and a lot of temptations. However, I always knew that a time would come when I would stand and say, “It is well with my soul.”

I got the opportunity to continue my schooling to the Junior High School in Assin Asamankese D/A JHS. I did my best to have good grades. One day, my headmaster asked if my mum would agree for me to move to his home and attend school. She agreed since that would help me study under supervision. During my stay with my headmaster, I had the opportunity accompany him to his church, which was The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Truly I enjoyed the Church service,

especially when they administered the sacrament and the reverence that was in the room during the service. I went home happy and feeling so good. After a while, I returned to home to my family so I didn't have the chance to visit that church again for about a year. I felt empty.

I lost my younger brother, and following that sad incident, my mum decided to stop going to church. We also followed her decision and stopped attending church too. One day I prayed and asked God what to say to my mum that would bring back her faith to go to church again. I had an earnest feeling to say this when I sat with her. I told her that I can't stay home any longer, so I wanted to attend the Latter-day Saints' Church again. She didn't see that to be bad, but she was a little bit skeptical due to gossip about the Church. Despite that, she allowed me to visit the church again. That Sunday, I was contacted by some missionaries who asked me if they could visit me at home during the week. I agreed and set an appointment. I informed my mother and step-father of my meeting with the missionaries.

The missionaries arrived and told me how the gospel would bless my life and my family. I enjoyed their visit and rescheduled another appointment. They gave me a copy of the Book of Mormon to read and to pray about. I did as they said and felt so

good after reading that I introduced that to my mum and invited her and my dad to be present in the next lesson with the missionaries. They accepted my proposal and were present for subsequent discussions.

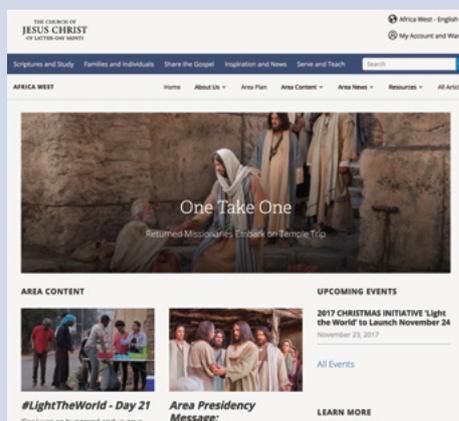
Having read the Book of Mormon and knowing the happy feeling I had each time I attended church, it wasn't hard for me to believe what they were saying. My parents were given the same invitation, and they did as the missionaries said. To my utmost surprise, my father sat beside me and said, "I know what the missionaries say to be true." Despite my surprise, I was elated!

My mum later said, "I'm not going to get baptized until your dad does." She didn't know that he had already accepted the truth, so we told her that we were both ready for baptism. She

agreed and my younger brother also decided to join us. My dad and I were baptized on July 16, 2010. My mum and brother were baptized the following week. It has been a great adventure for us since we accepted this invitation. I have been blessed with the opportunity to serve a full-time mission in the Nigeria Enugu Mission. My father currently serves as a bishop and my mum is the ward Primary president.

I stand as a witness of this truth. I know that this gospel is true. I testify that Joseph Smith was a prophet, that the Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ and that if we read, ponder, and pray about it, the truth will be manifested to us through the power of the Holy Ghost. I share this with you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, amen. ■

VISIT AREA WEBSITES!



Africa West Area Websites:

English: africawest.lds.org

French: afriquedelouest.lds.org

Mormon Newsroom Ghana:

www.mormonnewsroom.com.gh

Mormon Newsroom Nigeria:

www.mormonnewsroom.org.ng ■

What Can I Bring for Thanksgiving?

By Austin Akomah-Mordi

DPA Benin City, Nigeria

The Free Eye Expedition, held in July 2017 in Benin City by LDS Charities, may have come and gone, but to Mr. Solomon Agbonkoko, a widower and retired civil servant, it left behind a legacy of restored sight and membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“I have been living life in total darkness. I had forgotten what light looked like. It has been total darkness

for several years now. I did not even know some of my grandchildren by their faces. It was very bad. But I thank God for this Church, I can see again.”

The culprit was cataract. According to Dr. Rita Momoh, an ophthalmologist and president of the Benin City branch of the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria, full-grown cataract could lead to permanent blindness.

The octogenarian observed that he was not only living in physical darkness but in spiritual darkness as well. With the welcome result of the surgery, he felt it was time to find out more about this unique Church that gave freely to the needy and indigent

of society. So, like the 10th leper who returned to thank Jesus Christ in the Holy Bible, Pa Solomon thought of bringing items of thanksgiving to the Church but was counseled to receive missionaries instead.

“I didn’t know how to say thank you. Because I stopped going to church long ago, I went to the unit close by to seek advice about what to bring for thanksgiving. But I was advised by the leader (bishop) to receive the missionaries instead. Now I have been baptized into the true Church, I am happy. Now I read a lot. Among the first things I read after my sight was restored were tracts from the missionaries, who have been visiting me regularly. I am also reading the Book of Mormon now.”

Pa Solomon believed that God wanted him to see again. His friends knew that he had lost his sight and that had affected him badly. So when the announcement was made in wards about the free eye clinic, a member friend of his visited him with the news. He reluctantly went to the venue and was surprised at the immediate attention he received, which culminated in the surgery.

“After the surgery, I had to be blindfolded, and the Church brought me home in an official bus. I was in pain, but I prayed to God for comfort. I slept very well that night, and in the morning, I noticed light filtering through the blindfold. I could not believe it, but God had blessed me with my sight again!” ■



Solomon Agbonkoko