

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
OFFICE OF THE FIRST PRESIDENCY
47 EAST SOUTH TEMPLE STREET, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH 84150-1200

November 16, 2018

To: General Authorities; General Auxiliary Presidencies; and the following leaders in the United States and Canada: Area Seventies; Stake, Mission, and District Presidents; Bishops and Branch Presidents

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Service Missions for Young Missionaries (U.S. and Canada Only)

The Lord declared, “If ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work” (Doctrine and Covenants 4:3). To serve the Lord as a missionary is a glorious, sacred privilege that brings eternal blessings to the individual and those he or she serves.

For many years, young men and women with a desire to serve God through missionary service but who are unable to do so for health reasons have served the Lord valiantly in various community and Church organizations. We are grateful for their service and are pleased to announce increased opportunities for young missionaries who have health challenges.

Beginning on January 2, 2019, all young missionary candidates will use the missionary online recommendation process. Under the direction of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, each prospective missionary who qualifies will receive a call that best suits him or her.

Preaching the gospel to gather scattered Israel will always be the primary purpose of missionary service, so the Lord, through His leaders, will call most young people to find, teach, and baptize converts. Others, unable to serve in this manner, may be called to serve the Lord as a service missionary. Additionally, missionaries who return home early from a proselyting mission for long-term health reasons may be reassigned to serve the Lord as a service missionary. Some other candidates may, with our appreciation for their desire to serve, be honorably excused from any formal missionary service.

For more information, please review the explanatory document enclosed and materials at lds.org/service-missionary.

We pray that the Lord will continue to bless the wonderful young men and women throughout the Church who love Him and desire to serve.

Sincerely yours,







The First Presidency

This letter, with enclosure, is being translated and will be distributed to units identified as Spanish. If leaders need this letter in additional languages, they may contact the Area Presidency. Area leaders can forward requests to the Priesthood and Family Department at ext. 2-2933.

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A service missionary is called by the Lord through His prophet to serve in an environment uniquely tailored to the service missionary's interests, abilities, and talents. Service missionaries live at home and serve for 6 to 18 months (young women ages 19–25) and 6 to 24 months (young men ages 18–25). They serve as close to full-time as their circumstances allow. Many service missionaries will serve the Lord in multiple assignments, including with approved charitable organizations, Church operations, and stake-assigned opportunities. Throughout their missions, service missionaries serve the Lord under the ecclesiastical direction of their stake presidents.

A service mission is an acceptable offering to the Lord when a proselyting mission is not possible. Therefore, referring to a proselyting mission as a “real mission,” “normal mission,” or “traditional mission” is inaccurate and should be avoided. All missionaries represent the Lord and carry out His work.

The objectives of a service mission include the following:

- Provide an opportunity for all willing young women and young men to serve the Lord and increase in testimony of Him.
- Help each service missionary prepare for a lifetime of service.
- Provide needed and valuable service to the Lord through serving in Church and community organizations.

Service Mission Eligibility

Those who may be called to a service mission include worthy young men (ages 18–25) and young women (ages 19–25) unable to serve a proselyting mission for physical, mental, or emotional reasons. In addition, proselyting missionaries who return home early due to accident, illness, or other health conditions and have the desire and ability to continue their service to the Lord may be reassigned to a service mission when recommended by their stake president and General Authorities in the Missionary Department and when approved by the Quorum of the Twelve.

The standards of worthiness for service missionaries are the same as for proselyting missionaries. Service missionaries must be temple worthy, and young men must be ordained to the priesthood, generally to the office of elder.

Missionary Recommendation Process

All worthy young men and young women with a desire to serve a mission complete online recommendation forms and participate in interviews with their bishop and stake president. The application also includes evaluations by medical professionals.

A missionary candidate does not choose which kind of mission he or she will serve. All applicants are considered first for proselyting missions. Young men and women who are unable to be called as proselyting missionaries for physical, mental, or emotional reasons may be called to serve the Lord as service missionaries.

A stake president does not determine whether an applicant is called to a proselyting mission or a service mission. If he is confident the candidate will not successfully serve either type of mission, he may express thanks for his or her willingness to serve but recommend that a call not be issued.

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When the stake president is unsure if a candidate could serve a proselyting mission, he may discuss with the candidate the possibility of being called to a two-transfer mission,¹ a service mission, or being honorably excused.

If it is determined that a candidate will not be called to a proselyting mission, a Missionary Department representative will counsel with the stake president before a service mission call is issued.

Service missionaries are invited to speak in sacrament meeting before and after their missions, and they report to the high council upon completion of the mission. A calling as a service missionary is recorded on a membership record in the same way as a proselyting mission.

Service Mission Office at Church Headquarters

The Service Mission Office at Church headquarters works closely with the Missionary Department in the recommendation process, provides support to local priesthood leaders and to Church and community charitable operations, and provides training, resources, and information.

Service Mission Leaders in the Field

Where needed, an Area Presidency authorizes an Area Seventy to call and set apart a mature couple as service mission leaders. These leaders are trained by staff in Salt Lake City and serve as a liaison between stake presidents, charitable organizations, and Church operations. While these leaders are not called for a specific length of time, they serve long enough to develop expertise and to foster relationships with community organizations.

Service mission leaders assist stake presidents by regularly reviewing how a service missionary is performing. The stake president is ecclesiastically responsible for the service missionary.

External operations managers are responsible for Church or community service organizations, such as a bishops' storehouse or a soup kitchen. They help each service missionary have a rewarding experience while serving at the assigned location. They reinforce the service missionary's personal commitment to the standards in the *Service Missionary Handbook*.

Service Missionary Responsibilities

Service missionaries always wear service missionary name badges at their service assignment, at service mission meetings, and at Sunday Church meetings. They do not wear name badges at other times.

Service missionaries and their families are responsible for expenses related to missionary service. Family expenses include but are not limited to transportation, food, clothing, and medical, dental, and auto insurance. Service missionaries and their families are responsible for transportation to and from their service locations. Service missionaries receive no financial support from the General Missionary Fund.

Roles of Parents and Leaders

Parents help identify a prospective service missionary's interests, abilities, and talents. They give

¹ A two-transfer mission is a trial proselyting mission. If the trial mission is successful, the missionary may receive a 15-month or 21-month proselyting mission extension to the same or a different mission. If not, the missionary can be reassigned to a service mission.

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priesthood leaders and service mission leaders insight into ways the service missionary can serve effectively. Parents also commit to provide support needed during the mission, such as following up on each day's activities, providing transportation, helping with expenses, and offering other love and support.

The **bishop** determines the candidate's worthiness and readiness to serve. He initiates the online missionary recommendation form.

The **stake president** reviews, approves, and submits the online missionary recommendation form for all missionaries, including those who serve the Lord in service missions. After the candidate accepts his or her service mission call online, the stake president—with the assistance of the service mission leaders, parents, and operations managers—finalizes and approves a custom mission experience for service to the Lord. To identify the best assignment for the missionary, the candidate, parents, and service mission leaders may visit potential service locations.

The stake president ensures that the missionary is committed to following the service mission guidelines. He sets apart the service missionary and presents the customized schedule and name badge to him or her. At the end of the missionary's service, the stake president interviews the missionary, gives her or him a certificate of release, and notifies the Service Mission Office at Church headquarters of the release.

The stake president, or a priesthood leader he designates, provides support throughout the service mission by regularly discussing with the service missionary how he or she feels about his or her service to the Lord, as well as his or her well-being, progress, and skills development. Worthiness interviews, however, are conducted only by the stake president or bishop.

More Information

Additional information can be found at [lds.org/service-missionary](https://www.lds.org/service-missionary), including such topics as early returned missionaries, companionships, roles and responsibilities, mission assignments, and missionary safety.

Leaders may also contact the Service Mission Office at 801-240-4914 (Monday to Friday, 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. mountain time) or at support-servicemission@ldschurch.org.