

# *The Challenges of the International Growth of the Church in the New Millennium*

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I was listening to a Jerry Seinfeld CD recently, and in one of his sets he pointed out that he had recently read that speaking in front of a crowd is the number one fear of the average person. Number two was death. So, for the average person, that means that if you were at a funeral, you'd rather be in the casket than doing the eulogy. I thought it was funny when I heard it, but now that I have to give this talk, I actually believe it.

When the Savior was here on the earth, he made it clear to his disciples that his mortal ministry was with the house of Israel and not with other nations (Matthew 15:24). After his death and resurrection, however, he met with his disciples and expanded their mission as follows:

*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*

*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. [Matthew 28:19–20]*

However, it took them a while to grasp the full import of the Savior's charge. Many of the original journeys of the apostles were to pockets of Jews living in Asia Minor. They were of the opinion that only the Jews should be

allowed to accept the gospel. But a revelation to Peter recorded in Acts 10 changed all that. As you may recall, Cornelius, a centurion who was described as a good man, was told in a vision to find Peter and seek his advice on matters of the Spirit. The next day he sent his servants to Joppa, where Peter was staying. Meanwhile, Peter, who was hungry and waiting for a meal to be prepared, went to the housetop to pray. As he prayed, he had a vision in which he saw descending from the heavens a vessel that looked like a sheet knit at the four corners. Within the sheet were different foods that the Jews had been commanded by the Lord not to eat. But a voice came to Peter commanding him to eat the things in the sheet. Peter's response was that he could not because he had never eaten anything that was common or unclean. The voice spoke to him a second time, saying, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (Acts 10:15).

When the vision ended, Peter had no idea what it meant, and this must have been frustrating. Dreams can be like that sometimes.

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As he was thinking about the vision and what it could have meant, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them” (Acts 10:19–20). So Peter met the three men and went with them to Caesarea the next day to meet with Cornelius. As Peter met Cornelius, he finally figured out what the vision meant. He said:

*Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*  
[Acts 10:28]

Then, after meeting with Cornelius, learning of his desires, and feeling his spirit, Peter said:

*Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:  
But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*  
[Acts 10:34–35]

The Church leadership, however, continued to struggle with how to deal with the Gentiles who wanted to join the Church. They came from different countries, backgrounds, cultures, and traditions. But they all loved the Lord and wanted to be obedient to his commandments. The challenge for the leaders from a Jewish background was to figure out how to separate the essentials of the gospel from the nonessential elements of Jewish tradition. The key was that all the converts, both Jew and Gentile, had to look inside themselves and their backgrounds, cultures, and traditions and determine what was really essential for them to return to the presence of God. And what is significant to me is that it took leaders like Peter and Paul, who had traveled outside of Judea, meeting with Jews and Gentiles alike to figure out what

were really the essential aspects of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Church may face different challenges now than it did at the time of Peter and Paul, but it still has to deal with converts from different countries with different languages and cultures, all struggling to get closer to their Heavenly Father.

As you know, the Church is growing faster outside of the United States than it is inside. In order to help you understand the magnitude of the challenge facing the Church because of its international growth, I am going to run through a few numbers. You will see how much faster the international growth is. In 1970, 68.8 percent of the total Church population resided inside of the United States, but in early 1996, international membership caught up to U.S. membership. As we move into the 21st century at the end of this year, U.S. membership will be only 46.8 percent of the total. Using a very conservative linear forecast of Church membership, U.S. membership will fall to only 37.8 percent of the total by the year 2020. On average, the Church is growing by about 355,500 members a year, of which about 267,500 are from outside of the United States and a little less than 88,000 are from inside the United States. Church membership will probably have doubled twice between 1970 and 2002.

Total membership should rise to 11.2 million by the end of this year as we usher in the new millennium and should reach at least 18.4 million by 2020. If you assume a more aggressive exponential forecast of Church growth with U.S. growth averaging about 2 percent and non-U.S. growth averaging a little over 8 percent, total membership could rise to just over 25 million in 20 years, with less than one-third coming from the United States.

By the end of this year there will be 14 countries with a Church population over 100,000 members, which is roughly the size of the Church in Colorado. Of that group, the United States, Canada, England, and Japan are

the only high-income countries, and their Church membership is growing significantly slower than the membership of the other 10 countries, which are from Latin America and the Philippines. Second-place Mexico will probably end up with about 834,000 members by the end of the year, followed by Brazil with about 743,000 members and Chile with about 536,000 members. Brazil and Chile are growing annually by 7.8 percent and 7.7 percent, respectively, on average, whereas Mexico is only growing at 3.2 percent per year.

This should not be meant to underestimate the importance of the heart of the Church in Utah. In a regional conference in the Marriott Center on January 16, President Faust noted that Utah is still the heart of the Church. Making up only 15.4 percent of the total Church population, Utah Saints still generate 39 percent of the tithing of the Church. It is not possible for me to get similar statistics on missionaries, but I would imagine that Utah also generates an inordinate percentage of the missionaries of the Church.

I have been interested in the international dimension of the Church since I served a mission in Brazil from January 1964 to January 1966. I gave a talk in the Kennedy Center in 1996 describing the events that led me to get a doctorate in international business at Indiana University, and I promise not to repeat much of what I said there. But my interest in the cultural, legal, political, and economic dimensions of the global economy fits very nicely with the forces that influence our success or failure in different countries and cultures. In addition, I have always been intrigued with the unique role that BYU as an institution and we as individuals can and will play in the internationalization process in the future.

As I prepared this talk, I had the opportunity to speak with many different individuals at home and abroad. One comment by Richard Turley, the managing director of the Family History Department of the Church, has really

stuck with me. To paraphrase him, "As I look at the statistical reports coming in from around the world, I see the clear guiding hand of the Lord in this work." That is our challenge—to see the hand of the Lord in this work and to figure out where we fit in.

Cultural differences present significant challenges in doing the work. One of the best talks I have heard on this issue was given by Elder Spencer J. Condie of the First Quorum of the Seventy at the Sixth Annual Conference of the International Society in 1995 at BYU. In his talk he quoted Arthur Henry King, a convert to the Church and former BYU faculty member, who said, "Most of you American Mormons cannot distinguish between what is gospel and what is Yankee" (in Spencer J. Condie, "Christian Values and Ethnic Diversity: How Much of a Country's Culture Can a Christian Convert Keep?" *For Ye Are All One in Christ Jesus: The Global Church in a World of Ethnic Diversity* [Provo, Utah: David M. Kennedy Center, Brigham Young University, 21 August 1995], p. 1). I had a Brazilian member of the Church tell me the same thing 32 years ago. This seems to be a timeless refrain.

Let me give you a few examples. Professor Gill, my very first academic advisor at BYU as a student in the early 1960s, served as a mission president in the India Bangalore Mission. He tells of the difficulty of dealing with the caste system in India, where the Brahman caste is identified as the clergy or highest caste in the Hindu faith. How can a Brahman convert subject himself to the leadership of a branch president who is from a lower caste? (See Gurcharan S. Gill, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in India," *For Ye Are All One*, p. 76.)

In Mongolia, President Cook had to deal with the Mongolian practice of drinking fermented milk. The Church did not want to rewrite the Word of Wisdom to take care of every different health concern around the world, so President Cook had to teach the

members to drink fresh milk instead of fermented milk. (See Richard E. and Mary N. Cook, “Mongolia,” *Religious Liberty and the Global Church: The Challenge of Sharing*, Seventh Annual Conference of the International Society [Provo, Utah: David M. Kennedy Center, Brigham Young University, 19 August 1996], pp. 71–76.) I could go on and on, but the point is that we have numerous challenges as we take the gospel to different countries and cultures. And it isn’t going to get any easier. All of the countries where we have limited or no presence are very different from Western culture in general and Utah culture in particular. Given the celebration of Human Rights Day yesterday, how can we appreciate and take into account the diversity among us as we take abroad the message of the atoning sacrifice of the Savior and the restoration of the gospel in the latter days?

As we move around the world, we face three other challenges besides culture: continuing to grow, retaining new members, and creating an adequate leadership base. To illustrate these issues, I will use some examples from Brazil.

The first Church members in Brazil were German immigrants, and the first convert baptism took place in 1929. The first mission was created in 1935. If the Church had continued to grow at its pre-1970 growth rate, there would have only been about 180,000 members of the Church today. However, the revelation on the priesthood in 1978 and the dedication of the São Paulo Temple that same year created a huge kink in the growth curve, resulting in about 680,000 members today.

The first stake of the Church in São Paulo was created after I left my mission in Brazil in 1966. By 1993 there were 104 stakes. It took just under 30 years for the first 100 stakes to be created. At the end of 1997 there were 173 stakes in Brazil—more than in all of Europe and Asia combined, excluding the South

Pacific. With the recent division of two missions, there are now 25 missions in Brazil.

The growth of the Church in Brazil is strong. During the decade of the nineties the Church has grown by an average of 38,900 members per year. Two years ago I interviewed Elder Archibald, then the Brazil Area president, about Church growth. He noted at that time that the Church was baptizing an average of 1,000 men per month, of which 200–300 were missionary age. If the Church could retain these 200 young men and send them on missions, they could create 37 missions in Brazil. If they could have two young men serving missions from each of the 1,500 wards and branches in Brazil (there are now over 1,700), they could create 48 missions, just from local males. Counting sisters and North American missionaries, they could create 90–100 missions in Brazil, which is roughly the same number of missions per capita that exist in Chile. Right now, roughly half of the missionaries in Brazil are Brazilians.

However, growth in the missionary force is a key issue. In North America, the major source of missionaries worldwide, the number of young men of missionary age is starting to decline, just due to normal demographics. We may see the curve swing back up again at some point in the future, but the numbers are very predictable in the near term, based on the number of individuals in current age groups. How are we going to be able to increase the missionary pool so that we can open new missions and continue to grow, let alone keep from closing existing missions? We need to get more of our missionary age youth in North America to be worthy to serve on missions, and we need to rely more on non-North American missionaries. Both will involve significant challenges in the future.

Thus one of the keys to growth in the missionary work is retention. President Hinckley did an excellent job of addressing that issue in the priesthood session of general conference in

November 1997 when he encouraged us to focus on retention of converts. I think it is pretty standard in the Church today for missionaries to spend about 30 percent of their missionary time on retention and reactivation. I think this actually has a dual objective. By visiting inactive members, missionaries are brought into a whole new circle of investigators. That wouldn't be the case if they just worked with the same active members over and over again. In addition, working on retention builds up the activity base of the members and increases the pool of potential missionaries. My son, Ryan, who served in the Adelaide Australia Mission, told me that their focus on retention and reactivation increased retention of new members from 17 percent to 86 percent and increased the activity level by 4.5 percent in one year.

Activity and retention in Brazil varies from stake to stake and ward to ward. But one of our BYU MBA graduates who is currently in a stake presidency in São Paulo told me that the activity rate in the São Paulo stakes is averaging about 34 percent, and the retention of new members is about 60–65 percent. That's not bad.

Where are the leaders coming from? With such rapid growth and the division of wards and stakes in Brazil, there is an ever-increasing search for leaders. It is very common to see newly married young men only 25 or 26 years old being called as bishops. The challenge is that they are being saddled with a pretty significant responsibility just as they are starting their families and their careers. Even though they are relatively young and inexperienced, they are coming from the huge pool of newly returned missionaries. With the benefit of the mission experience, they are being trained for Church leadership in ways that would not be possible any other way. In addition, they are perpetuating the missionary force. Another of our graduates who is a stake president in São Paulo told me that a bishop who has served a

mission is much more likely to prepare his Young Men to serve missions than is a bishop who has not served a mission. The bigger challenge for our Church membership in Brazil is helping to prepare individuals for successful careers. If they are not well employed, they have a difficult time being a husband, father, and Church leader.

Let me focus now on the role of temples in the international growth of the Church. I am convinced that a major part of the solution to retention and leadership building is temple attendance. When Tani and I were married in 1968, there were only 13 operating temples in the Church, and only the New Zealand, London, and Swiss temples were outside of the United States and Canada. After we were married, we moved first to Indiana for four years of graduate work and then to Penn State for my first university position. We remained there for eight years. There weren't very many temples close to Indiana and Pennsylvania. I think we may have been in the Manti Temple District during those years. As a result, we did not get to the temple very often. However, shortly after moving to Indiana, the Church announced that a temple would be built in Washington, D.C. We sold concessions at the Kentucky Derby and the Indianapolis 500, put on chicken barbecues, and did any number of other things to reach our assessment.

Finally the temple was dedicated in 1974, and we only had to drive three and a half hours from State College, Pennsylvania, to Washington, D.C., to attend the temple. What a glorious experience that was. It was wonderful for the State College Branch members to travel to the temple and have their families sealed for time and eternity. I am convinced that the testimonies and conviction of the converts and the rest of us increased as we attended the temple regularly. Two of the most spiritual experiences I have had in my life were the direct result of going to the Washington D.C. Temple—once to seek an answer to a question and the other to

give me unsolicited direction for the members of the branch when I was serving as branch president. In both cases the inspiration of the Spirit came several days after a trip to the temple as the calm, peaceful feeling of the temple stayed with me. Many times in district council meetings we would discuss the principles of leadership that we learned in the temple as our district president would give us assignments and ask us to return to the next meeting and report on those assignments. We developed closeness as a branch family and as leaders.

About the time Tani and I were married, President Monson made his first trip to East Germany. Over the next several years a number of things happened to lift the spirits of the Saints. But one thing was being withheld from the members: the blessings of the temple. Entire families could not travel outside of East Germany to attend the Swiss Temple because of the government in East Germany. As President Monson said:

*The work moved forward. Now the paramount blessing needed was the privilege of our worthy members to receive their endowments and their sealings. In a private meeting on an upper floor of the Salt Lake Temple, President Spencer W. Kimball and his counselors . . . addressed the subject and said, "We know and appreciate the need of our members in Eastern Europe to receive their temple blessings. We know you love them. Find a way." When the Prophet of the Lord says, "Find a way," you must find a way.*

*We explored every possibility. . . . Then, through the fasting and the prayers of many members, and in a most natural manner, government leaders proposed: Rather than having your people go to Switzerland to visit a temple, why don't you build a temple here in the German Democratic Republic? [Thomas S. Monson, *The Church in a Changing World*, Fifth Annual BYU Management Society Dinner, Washington, D.C., 25 February 1989, p. 9]*

This gave rise to the temple in Freiberg, which was dedicated in 1985.

I was also touched during the October 1994 general conference as Elder Claudio Costa told the following story:

*During the time I presided over the Brazil Manaus Mission, I witnessed great examples of true success, stories which came from people truly devoted to the gospel and to their covenants with God.*

*One man I met lived simply in a tiny, little town in the middle of the Amazon. After being baptized with his family, he could hardly wait to complete a year's membership in the Church so he could take his wife and children to the temple. The São Paulo Brazil Temple is very far from the Amazon. It usually takes four days by boat and four days by bus to get to the temple—about a week's travel. This man was a cabinetmaker. How could he save enough money to pay for himself, his wife, and his children? Although he worked hard for many months, he made very little money.*

*When the time came to go to the temple, he sold all his furniture and appliances, even his electric saw and his only means of transportation, a motorcycle—everything he had—and went to the temple with his wife and children. It required eight days of travel to reach São Paulo. After spending four glorious days in the temple doing the work of the Lord, this family then had to travel seven more days to return to their home. But they went back home happy, feeling that their difficulties and struggles were nothing compared to the great happiness and blessings they had experienced in the house of the Lord. [Claudio R. M. Costa, "Priceless Principles for Success," *Ensign*, November 1994, p. 27]*

The Lord has certainly heard the prayers of the faithful. There are now 54 temples in operation, including the recently dedicated Alaska Temple. However, that is not enough. So in October conference in 1997, President Hinckley announced the concept of smaller temples.

With 54 operating temples, the 20 under construction, and the 25 new ones announced as of today, there is a total of 99 temples. They will have a definite impact on the members of the Church in far-flung areas of the world. The number of total tithe payers will rise as members work to become and remain temple worthy, testimonies and commitment will deepen, and the Spirit of God will settle on the people like a warm, comfortable blanket—a metaphor that my daughter, Melanie, will certainly appreciate while she is in Russia. Now the challenge of the Family History Department will be to establish family history centers close to each of the temples so that members all around the world will be able to do work on their own ancestors.

There are lots of implications for us as students, faculty, and staff at BYU. At the Annual University Conference in August 1998, President Bateman gave an excellent talk on BYU in the new millennium. I would like to focus on different matters and issue a few challenges. First, students, prepare yourselves to preach the gospel around the world. When Melanie was a student at BYU—Hawaii, she got to know some South African surfers. She had always wanted to go on a mission, but when they started asking her questions about the Church, she wondered if she was really prepared to preach the gospel. So this fall she took a missionary prep class, and I believe that made a major difference in her attitude and gave her more confidence. It was truly an example of Alma 17:2–3.

Second, appreciate the international diversity of your classmates. There are currently 1,928 international students and scholars at BYU from 114 different countries—about 5.5 percent of our student body. They bring with them a wealth of different languages, cultures, values, and attitudes. Most but not all are LDS. Those who are not LDS have a particularly difficult time adjusting to U.S. culture, Utah culture, and LDS culture. Listen to them and learn

from them. Appreciate their points of view and realize that they can teach you a great deal about the world. Your experiences as a missionary abroad are only the tip of the iceberg, and you still have a lot to learn. But you international students have a great deal to learn from your U.S. classmates as well. What a wonderful time to observe the workings of the Church right here in the heart of the Church. You will take back to your countries ideas that will help you as you rise to positions of leadership in your respective countries.

My wife's sister and brother-in-law just returned from Europe as public relations missionaries. They had a wonderful experience and had the opportunity to travel all around Europe. When I asked them where would be an ideal place to serve, they mentioned Estonia. When I pressed them for the reason for Estonia, they responded, "Because that is where they need couple missionaries." What a great response. What are we doing as faculty and staff to prepare ourselves to serve missions? Couple missionaries can provide such great leadership training to these 25-year-old returned missionaries who are being called as bishops. I told Tani that she should start studying Portuguese so that we can serve a mission in 10 years when we retire—maybe to Brazil or Portugal, or even to Angola or Mozambique. Have you talked about this in your family so that a mission call is not such a shock if it comes? The Lord needs teachers, temple workers, humanitarian service workers, etc. What is your niche? If you are one of the 50 exbishops in your high priests group, serve as an ordinance worker in the temple so that you can learn the ordinances and possibly serve as a temple worker somewhere in the world. Invite foreign students to your homes to share the love of your family when they are so far away from home and so lonely.

I am constantly amazed when I see the ways a BYU experience influences people, especially nonmembers who visit here. I

recently corresponded with an MBA graduate from Brazil who is not LDS, and I asked him about his experience here. I want to share with you a few of his comments:

*The fact that we were not members of the Church did not prevent us from understanding the Church principles a little bit more. With a close group of MBA friends, we visited Temple Square in Salt Lake City three or four times. We had some group discussions at our home, and we also received missionaries at home three or four times. It was our intent to get a better understanding of the principles that existed behind the culture that was predominant in Provo.*

There are some great lessons to be learned from him about how to adjust in a new culture. He did not join the Church, but he left here with kind feelings and with friends for life.

A second example involved a graduation dinner I attended with several executives from LG Group of Korea who attended a special executive program at BYU in 1996. At the closing banquet, several of them stood and mentioned what an enjoyable time they had had. The head of human resources for LG Group addressed those present and said, “You learned a lot while you were here. You may not have learned a lot about America, because this place is not like America.” He went on to explain the types of values they learned, values associated with the LDS culture. This man was not LDS, but he was very perceptive, and I was surprised that he was so open in telling his people that Utah is not like any other place in the United States.

A third example involved a visiting professor from a Korean university. He was not LDS when he came here, but he just wanted to come here to take some classes and interact with the faculty. We didn’t recruit him; we didn’t know why he came. One day the elders quorum presidency of the ward where he lived in Provo was walking around the neighborhood, and

the elders quorum president felt impressed to knock on the family’s door. The wife came to the door, and they introduced themselves. She told them that they were interested in learning more about the Church. Not long thereafter they were baptized into the Church, and they have since returned to Korea. What a wonderful place to be where we can interact with so many wonderful children of God: faculty and students who may not all share our faith but who share our love for the good in life.

We have supported a number of foreign students in our graduate business programs through the International Student Sponsor Program, with the precondition that they agree to return to their home country. It has been wonderful to see these young men and women return home to good jobs and positions of leadership in the Church. For example, Alfredo Salas is president of the Buenos Aires Argentina West Stake, Marcos Aidukaitis is president of the Osasco Brazil Stake, Adilson Parrella is a member of a stake presidency in São Paulo, Paulo Amorim was an area authority in Brazil and is now an area authority in Cincinnati, and Jorge Zeballos is an area authority in the Chile Area. Not only are they succeeding in professional pursuits, but they are also building the kingdom of God. What an inspired program.

Now let me close by personalizing this a little. On January 12, 1992, Jody Jorgensen Nichols, a neighbor of ours and one of the best friends of our daughter, Jani, left the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, and flew to Helsinki, Finland, with two elders and two other sisters to serve in the Finland Helsinki East Mission. All had been studying Russian and were preparing to preach to the Russian people. At that point there was no mission in Russia, but Gary Browning, president of the Finland Helsinki East Mission, was responsible for the members and missionaries in the former Soviet Union. Our good friends Gerald and Peggy Jorgensen, Jody’s parents,

were a little apprehensive about sending Jody off to Russia. In fact, Peggy told me that she even wondered if she would ever see Jody again. Their understanding was that Jody would live in Helsinki but travel back and forth to different spots in Russia to teach the people.

When Jody arrived in Helsinki, she and her group were notified that they would all leave for Saint Petersburg the next day. However, one would continue on alone to Moscow. Little did they know what was going to be announced that weekend. The next morning, as they prepared to leave, Jody was told that she would be the lone missionary continuing on to Moscow. She sat down and wrote a short note to her parents explaining that she was the only missionary in her group of five who would travel on to Moscow. On Thursday, January 16, Jody arrived in Moscow, where she met up with her companion and began to work with a small group in the Church. At that time there was one main branch and three small groups in Moscow, all clustered around metro stops. On Saturday, Jody attended a zone conference where it was announced that two new missions were being created: the Russia Saint Petersburg and Russia Moscow Missions. So now she knew that she would be working in Russia for the remainder of her mission. Only a few days later, on Monday, her letter from Helsinki arrived in Orem, and the reality of the transfer began to set in for Gerald and Peggy. Would Peggy's premonition come true? Needless to say, Monday was a very difficult day. All they knew was that Jody was leaving her companions behind and traveling alone to Moscow to begin her work.

At the same time, not knowing that Jody had left the MTC, I was preparing for a trip to Moscow. I had been invited to present a paper at a conference being hosted by Moscow State University, and I was having a difficult time getting a visa. In fact, I nearly canceled my trip because I knew that I would miss the plenary

session where I was to present my paper. But I had my tickets, and I didn't want to let down my host. So in the Dulles Airport I met a courier with my visa and then headed off to Moscow about the same time Jody was on the train leaving Helsinki. I knew I would be there on Sunday, so I asked my nonmember friend, Andrei Markov—then the vice dean of the College of Economics at Moscow State University—if he could find an LDS branch for me to attend. On Sunday, only a few days after Jody arrived in Moscow, I had a taxi take me to the building close to the university metro stop where the Church group was meeting. I was early—one of the few times that has happened in my life—so I sat in the cold foyer of the building and waited for the members to arrive. Who was one of the first people to walk through the door? Jody Jorgensen. We were both shocked. I told her to sit down during church and write a letter to her parents. And then it was so fun to listen to Jody bear her testimony in Russian, having only been in the country a few days. She had prepared herself well.

The next day I flew home. That happened to be the day that Gerald and Peggy received Jody's letter from Helsinki. When I arrived home about 10 p.m. or so, I called Gerald to tell him that I had just come from Moscow, where I had gone to church with Jody, and that I had a letter for them. Needless to say, he came right over. Peggy has since told me that when they got my call that Monday night, she was lying in bed clutching her scriptures, worried to death about Jody. Once she got the letter I brought, she felt a feeling of peace come over her that never left her for the rest of Jody's mission. She knew that everything would be all right.

Does the Lord care about these things? Of course he does. Was it a coincidence that I decided to go to Moscow, even though I missed part of the conference? Was it a coincidence that Jody and I ended up in the same building at the same time? Of course not. Sometimes, if

we step back, we can see the Lord's hand in his work.

One more interesting thing happened. Leonid, a student at Moscow State University, was my guide at the meetings, so I gave his contact information to Jody. Since Jody and her companion were not allowed to teach a single male alone, they asked if he knew any women who would be interested in hearing about the gospel, too. So Leonid arranged for them to meet his sister, Dina, who subsequently joined the Church, even though he didn't. Isn't it interesting how we can be tools in the hands of the Lord?

What does this all have to do with me? Jody's future husband, Jim Nichols, was one of the missionaries who opened Samara to the work, and Jody served there for two months after Jim had been transferred back to Moscow. On February 10, our daughter, Melanie, will enter the MTC to learn Russian so that she can be sent to the Russia Samara Mission. Just as I was a comfort to Gerald and Peggy when Jody was on her mission in Russia, now Jim and

Jody are a comfort to us as they help us understand what Melanie will be facing in Samara and how much she will love the people and the area. People ask me, "Aren't you worried about sending Melanie there, given all that has happened to missionaries in Russia recently?" The clear answer is, "No." When she opened her call, all I felt was excitement. I have grown to truly love the Russian people I have met, and I am excited for Melanie and for the opportunity she will have to preach the gospel to them. To go back to one of my initial statements, I see the clear guiding hand of the Lord in this work.

I want to bear you my testimony that I know that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ. I am grateful for his atoning sacrifice and all he means to me. I am grateful for President Hinckley and for the tremendous work he is doing to spread the gospel throughout the earth and to open up temples, which allows members to receive their endowments and sealings and see their own faith and commitment deepen in the Church. I leave this testimony with you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.