

A New Era of Growth and Development

FRANKLIN D. RICHARDS

My dear young brothers and sisters, I consider it an honor to speak to you at this interesting and inspiring Twelve-Stake Fireside. I can truly say that it is always a real pleasure to visit the Brigham Young University campus and partake of the Spirit that is always here. You are choice young people. You are blessed with the blood of Israel; you are blessed with the gospel of Jesus Christ; you are blessed to live in this wonderful country; and you are blessed to be able to attend this great University. Each of us has the capacity to achieve something worthwhile and we should never forget that we are actually spirit children of our Father in heaven and that every person “is given a gift by the Spirit of God” (D&C 46:11).

Despite the fact that we are living in a troublesome period, we are living in the dispensation of the fulness of times, a most wonderful period in the history of the world—yes a new era of growth and development. Opportunities today, for young and old, exceed those of any other age. We should truly be grateful to live at this particular time when the Spirit of the Lord is being poured out upon the people of the earth so abundantly.

One of the important and distinguishing features of The Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints is that its affairs are administered by the lay members of the Church rather than by a paid clergy. I have been told by some of my nonmember friends that the thing that has impressed them most about the Church is that it gives every person a chance to serve and develop his or her talents, regardless of age. How true this is! The Church, in reality, is a vehicle for the growth and development of God’s children. The priesthood quorums, Relief Society, Mutual, Sunday School, Primary, and other church activities and programs all contribute to the development of members’ talents and provide opportunities for them to be shared with others. As we develop the spirit of giving and sharing, we find great peace, happiness, joy, and contentment as well as growth and development. May I therefore encourage each one of you to accept with enthusiasm every opportunity presented to you to serve, regarding it not as a burden but as a great blessing. Organize your time by putting first things first,

Franklin D. Richards was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 25 September 1977.

and perform each assignment well. By doing so, you will be magnified and your talents will be increased, as the Lord has said, “yea, even an hundred fold” (D&C 82:18).

President Kimball has asked us to lengthen our stride in building up the kingdom. Lengthening our stride certainly must include being more effective in our Church responsibilities.

Utah is known as the Beehive State. The early settlers, under the leadership of Brigham Young, named this area “Deseret,” meaning “the honey bee.” Therefore, the state motto is “Industry.” However, the beehive represents more than industry. It also suggests swarming and making more colonies of bees. This means the gathering of more honey to feed more bees and thus extend more blessings. In the pioneer days of Brigham Young, the swarming of new converts was to the Rocky Mountain area. Although there was only one Brigham Young, all pioneers became a part of the pioneering effort—may I say the swarming program.

But what about this new era of growth and development? In an address given on July 24, 1977, President Kimball said that “pioneering is the American way.” The beehive spirit of industry and swarming is just as applicable today as it was in the days of Brigham Young, but our opportunities today include worldwide swarming—the building of the Church in many parts of the world. Today the new members or colonies are requested to stay in their own lands and swarm there.

As the leaders of the Church in recent years have emphasized the advisability of building up strong units of the Church throughout the world, many interesting things are happening. The number of full-time missionaries has increased from 17,000 in 1975 to 25,000 today. The number of missions has increased in this same period from 114 to 156. And as a part of today’s pioneering program, President Kimball has requested the stakes and missions in various countries of the world to furnish more of their

own full-time missionaries. In 1974, outside the United States and Canada, there were approximately 1,200 of these local full-time missionaries, compared to approximately 2,500 today.

As thousands more of these missionaries are called in many countries throughout the world, they will need financial help. Our assisting them financially is another part of our present pioneering effort. We have the opportunity of making contributions, as quorums and/or individuals, to the Church Missionary Fund; in this way we, in effect, call our bank accounts on a mission. And as these local missionaries return from their missions, many of them will be the leaders of the Church in these scattered areas throughout the world. Yes, satisfying pioneering opportunities are available today as they were 130 years ago. Modern pioneering is a thrilling experience and each of us can be a part of it in one way or another.

One of the challenges before the Church today is to adapt our programs to worldwide conditions. We must recognize the specific problems in many developing countries and provide special assistance where feasible and appropriate. A few statistics showing some important trends in Church growth, as well as some estimates of future growth patterns, might be of interest to you. In 1976, there were 798 stakes in the Church, and reasonably conservative estimates of growth indicate that by 1990 only fifty-four percent of the membership of the Church will be living in the United States. Latin America and Asia are the areas outside the United States where the Church seems to be growing most rapidly. It is also interesting to note that the average number of convert baptisms per missionary is increasing.

God’s church has always been a missionary church, as we are required by modern revelation to take the restored gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (see D&C 133:37). We have also been told that

there are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it. [D&C 123:12]

We invite those who are seeking truth and a better way of life, wherever they may live, to sincerely investigate our message. It will answer the questions: What is the purpose of life? Where did we come from? And what is there after death?

The question is often asked, “How can we, a relatively small group, take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people?” Certainly not with the 25,000 full-time missionaries and thousands of stake missionaries we now have, regardless of how good they are. But our latter-day prophets have given us the “every member a missionary” plan and, in my opinion, we are now pioneering in this vital technique. I would like to talk to you about the “every member a missionary” program—an inspired, effective, and interesting plan.

First, missionary work includes three things: finding people to teach, teaching them the gospel principles, and fellowshipping them. All of us can participate in finding people to teach and in fellowshipping them, but the teaching is primarily the responsibility of the full-time and stake teaching missionaries. Today, missionaries spend much of their time in finding interested people to teach and a relatively small part of their time in teaching. With the “every member a missionary” plan, the members have an opportunity to do missionary work by finding and fellowshipping interested persons while the missionaries teach them. This greatly increases the effectiveness of the missionaries. They can teach many more people, particularly as they are taught in groups.

In working with missionaries throughout the world, I find that the great increase in convert baptisms, and especially baptisms of entire

families, is to a considerable extent attributable to the fact that a greater number of members are finding and fellowshipping persons for the missionaries to teach. The members are loving it. This is certainly a way we can lengthen our stride. I have had the opportunity of meeting many of these wonderful members and hearing of their exciting and happy experiences. I am confident that there are thousands of members of the Church that have a sincere desire to do missionary work, but do not know how to do it. How, then, can a member, regardless of age or sex, become an effective missionary within the meaning of the prophet’s admonition, “Every member a missionary”?

You ask, “What can I do?” Well, you can find such persons who would like to know more about the Church. “But how can I find such persons?” The following three ways are pretty much the basis of the “every member a missionary” program. First, live the gospel principles. Thousands join the Church each year as they are attracted to the Church by the life of a good member.

Second, it is easy to begin a gospel conversation by asking your friends and neighbors and people whom you meet as you go about your affairs what they know about the Church. Whether they know little or much, you can follow with another question: “Would you like to know more?” If they would like to know more, invite them into your home to be taught the gospel by the missionaries. If it is impossible to invite them into your home, give their names to the missionaries to follow up. Many of these referrals can give the missionaries the names of other interested persons, and this can go on indefinitely as it is pursued. Let me read you a letter I received from a sister in the Northwest:

Dear President Richards:

Ever since I joined the Church three and a half years ago, I have wished that all my friends and relatives had the same opportunity to investigate

the gospel and I have decided it's time that I asked to have the missionaries sent to my relatives. Most of them seem interested and curious about our Church since my brother and I joined it, so I am hoping and praying that they will recognize the truth when they hear it. It certainly leads to the happiest way of life, and I know I could have avoided pitfalls if I had only found it sooner. It's wonderful to have the true gospel to guide your children through their live, and so dangerous to try and raise them without it.

Then she listed the names and addresses of twenty-five friends and relatives, saying that she would appreciate very much having the missionaries call on these twenty-five people and that she would be praying that they would be as happy to receive the gospel message as she had been. This certainly is the "every member a missionary" program in action.

Sister Richards and I ask the Golden Questions frequently. We find many people who say, "Yes, I would like to know more," and we arrange for the missionaries to teach them; some of them have been baptized, bringing great happiness into our lives. Like Alma of old,

I know that which the Lord hath commanded me, and I glory in it. I do not glory of myself, but I glory in that which the Lord hath commanded me; yea, and this is my glory, that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy. [Alma 29:9]

In asking members throughout the world to ask the Golden Questions, at times I have sensed a feeling of skepticism and fear on their part; but frequently, afterwards, members have written me saying that although they were doubtful at first they tried asking the questions and were happily surprised to find many saying, "Yes, we would like to know more." The opportunity will present itself to you from day to day if you are thinking about it. So I suggest you try it with faith in your heart and

a smile on your face. I promise you that you will be happily surprised.

One of the most powerful forces in the Church is and always has been its youth. They love their friends and are not afraid to ask them the Golden Questions. A young man from Charlottesville, Virginia, was baptized; he went home and said to his grandmother, "Grandma, you ought to be baptized."

"I have been baptized in the Baptist church," she said.

"Yes, but Grandma, you haven't been baptized into the true church."

She said, "Maybe I haven't—who told you this?" The Mormon elders, he told her. She said, "Send them to me." He did and his grandmother was taught the gospel and baptized.

While attending a stake conference in California, I was told that one of the wards had a project of gathering newspapers and that a young man, while collecting papers from the neighbors, had asked the Golden Questions. Two families said they would like to know more about the Church and were later taught by the missionaries, fellowshipped, and baptized.

In another stake conference that I attended in California, a great deal of interest and enthusiasm was shown in the "every member a missionary" program. After the morning session, a young woman came up to me, introduced herself, and presented her friend, saying, "She is mine." Both of their faces reflected great joy and happiness. Then she explained that she had asked her friend the Golden Questions and her friend had replied that she was interested and would like to know more about the Church. The woman had then arranged for the missionaries to come to her home and teach her friend the beautiful truths of the gospel as contained in the discussions. Her friend had prayed, studied, and attended church to further her understanding. She soon gained a testimony and was baptized. No wonder that this good sister felt so much joy as she put her arm around her friend and said, "She is mine."

In Salt Lake City, a stake missionary, while eating lunch at a counter, met a young tourist. He asked him what he knew about the Mormon church and whether he would like to know more; the young tourist said he would like to know more. During the next few days the stake missionaries gave him the discussions. At a later time, he was baptized as a result of this. And incidentally, the Utah Mission is one of the leading missions of the Church insofar as convert baptisms per missionary is concerned.

About a year ago, I was in Toronto, Canada, attending a stake conference and while there spoke to the missionaries and suggested that they ask the Golden Questions at every opportunity. Later, the mission president sent me a copy of a letter he had received from one of his lady missionaries. The sister wrote:

When we first arrived in Kirkland Lake, our first assignment, we went to the grocery store; and as the young woman was checking our groceries, I could see her straining to read my name tag. I told her what it was and felt impressed to ask her the Golden Questions. So I said, "What do you know about the Mormons?"

She said, "Not much really." In reply to the second part, "Would you like to know more about them?" she said "Yes, as a matter of fact, I would." To make a long story short, she, her husband, her husband's brother, and his wife were baptized four months later, the delay being due to her husband's being away for two months.

Six weeks later, another dear sister was baptized as a result of this one Golden Question. Two weeks after that the couple across the street were baptized. Two weeks, still later, the Guild brothers baptized their mother, stepfather, and little sister in Toronto. The mother of Wendy, the girl I met in the grocery store, is now attending all meetings and wants to be taught the discussions. There are also three small children who will now be brought up in the Church, making a total of thirteen now in the Church, and

one soon to be baptized, I feel sure, as a result of asking the Golden Questions to this one person.

Yes, by asking the Golden Questions, you can truly lengthen your stride as President Kimball has asked us to do.

The third way of finding interested persons is by taking your friends and neighbors to church meetings and socials with you. I remember that in one branch the Relief Society needed an organist, so the president asked a nonmember friend to help them out. She replied that she would be glad to; and as she was being fellowshipped she became interested, was taught the gospel by the missionaries, and was baptized. In this same area, a young girl was walking home with a friend and began humming "Come, Come, Ye Saints." Her friend said, "My, that's a beautiful melody. What is it?" The girl told her about it and made a date to take her to a church service. After attending a few times, she arranged for the missionaries to teach her family. The family members have all been baptized and are happy doing their part in building the kingdom.

In a Las Vegas, Nevada, stake, I listened to a convert tell her story. She related how she and her family had moved to Las Vegas from Oklahoma. They moved two doors from a Mormon family, and shortly thereafter their young daughter was invited to go to Primary by the neighbor's daughter. She enjoyed relating her Primary lessons to her parents. About that time, the parents felt the need of religion in their home. The mother had been raised a Baptist so they attended the Baptist church, but they did not seem to enjoy it. The next Sunday, the parents were discussing which church they would attend. The young daughter suggested, "Why don't you go to my church?"—meaning where she had been attending Primary. The parents accepted the suggestion, went to the Mormon church, found what they were looking for, and later were baptized. This to me is

a beautiful example of “every member a missionary” in action.

In the *Church News* of August 6, 1977, there was an article entitled, “Idaho Falls Young Adults Bring in Converts.” Let me read you a few excerpts from this article.

Dan Kinsey had had the missionary discussions but still wasn't sure about joining the Church. Then he met the Young Adults of the Idaho Falls Idaho North stake and the decision was simple. He joined.

Clint Keeler, stake Young Adult chairman, says the program is successful because it is designed to reach the non-member as well as the member Young Adult.

These Young Adults not only invite their non-member friends, but they also work closely with the full-time missionaries, keeping them informed of activities and helping them fellowship their Young Adult contacts.

There have also been some unique fund-raising projects, like a dog wash instead of a car wash and the auction of handmade crafts and services to send funds to a Korean orphanage.

An authentic Greek dinner, Saturday morning breakfast while watching cartoons, and eating spaghetti with hands tied behind the back have all been enjoyed by these Young Adults at their weekly gatherings.

The program not only has been beneficial to prospective members, but has drawn some reluctant Young Adult members into activity.

The incidents I have related are typical of the “every member a missionary” program in action, and such incidents are happening in the stakes and missions throughout the world every day.

Another fruitful missionary field is part-member families. Some of your friends who are members may have married nonmembers; you can help in fellowshipping these nonmembers. Have the missionaries teach them the missionary discussions and then, when they have studied, prayed, and attended Church

and have received a testimony, you will have played a part in bringing them into the Church through the waters of baptism. A high percentage of prospective elders have married nonmembers, and by teaching and fellowshipping these nonmember wives with their husbands present many of the women can be baptized and their husbands prepared for the Melchizedek Priesthood. Where possible, these part-member families should be taught in compatible groups. By being taught in groups the strong can strengthen the weaker ones, and more convert baptisms result with less time and effort.

Many ask, “Are the converts staying in the Church and remaining active?” Yes, where fellowshipping is effective, generally a high percentage of the converts remain active. Fellowshipping, however, includes loving converts into the Church and giving them work assignments. It is not unusual to hear converts say, “It’s a great feeling to be needed.” I heard Brother Robert Giles, a convert in Las Vegas, Nevada, so testify. It is recommended that each new convert be given a position in the Church; and, in my opinion, many of these new converts would make excellent stake missionaries. These new members are like the saints of old when the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesian saints, “Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

Let us “remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God.” And as the Lord has said,

If it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!

And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me! [D&C 18:10, 15–16]

But let us remember what President Brigham Young so ably stated on one occasion, that “no blessing . . . sealed upon us will do us any good, unless we live for it” (*Journal of Discourses* 11:117).

Yes, my brothers and sisters, the Spirit of the Lord is being poured out upon all flesh, and men’s hearts are being softened. One branch president asked me, “How long will this missionary explosion go on in the Church?” The answer is found in the 65th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, verse two.

The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth.

We are living in a new era of growth and development and today we are pioneering on a worldwide basis. The Church is growing at an accelerated rate, and isn’t it wonderful that we can all participate in these modern pioneering experiences? Again, you ask, “How can we participate?” First, by making the “every member a missionary” program a part of our lives within the meaning of the prophet’s admonition. Second, President Kimball has asked for many more thousands of stake and full-time missionaries at home and abroad. We need more young men, more lady missionaries, and more couples. Let us do what we can to accomplish this objective. Third, thousands of these new missionaries called from developing

countries will need financial help. Let us make regular contributions to the missionary fund, either at the ward-stake level or by sending contributions to Church headquarters. You will find additional ways of pioneering as you become a part of the “every member a missionary” program. May we catch the vision of nearly four million member-missionaries bringing souls into the kingdom of God and feeling the joy and happiness that comes from this great work in this new era of growth and development.

And again, to all seekers of truth: a new life-style awaits those that accept the restored gospel and let it work in their lives. They will find the answer to their question: What is the purpose of life? We encourage seekers of truth to investigate Mormonism—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I know that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ, and I thrill when I testify to the truthfulness of that great vision—the first vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith. I appreciate the wonderful things that the Prophet Joseph Smith did; he was an instrument in the hands of the Lord in restoring the gospel, the priesthood, and the Church to the earth in this dispensation. I, like you, love and sustain our great prophet and leader, President Spencer W. Kimball; and I know and testify that he is indeed the prophet of the Lord and the head of the church of Jesus Christ on this earth today. Let us lengthen our stride and increase our effectiveness in our church work in order that the kingdom of God may go forth at an accelerated rate, so that the kingdom of heaven may come, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.