Brothers and sisters, aloha! Before we get started, I thought I needed to explain my red tie, because when I got up this morning, my 16-year-old son, Freddie, said, “Hey, Dad, why are you wearing that [University of Utah] tie to the devotional?” (He’s an avid BYU Cougar fan.) I pointed out that on the very bottom it says BYU–Hawaii. So aloha to you.

I express gratitude to the BYU administration for this opportunity to address you this morning. My remarks are dedicated to my mother, who taught me that every human being is a child of God, that He loves all His children, and that we should love them as well, regardless of race or religion. Although my parents and sister are not Latter-day Saints, they have always been a great support to me.

Genesis of the Kalaupapa Experience

In December 2003 I went to Hawaii to do research and invited my wife, JoAnna, to go with me, because I knew we would have a few days at the end of my workweek to also celebrate our 24th wedding anniversary. My research focused on the LDS history of Laie, on the island of Oahu, but I asked JoAnna where she would like to go on the Hawaiian Islands for our anniversary celebration. She replied that her priority would be to visit the Kalaupapa leprosy settlement on the north shore of the island of Molokai. We had been reading about this unique place, and I thought her suggestion was perfect. Our trip included a precarious mule ride down the steep 2,000-foot cliffs of the Molokai Range, which eventually spilled us out onto a four-mile peninsula of sacred space, a transforming terra firma known as Kalaupapa.

The literal translation of Kalaupapa may be rendered “flat plain” or “flat leaf.”1 In either case, it is surely a leveling experience for all who cross the boundaries of their own professed beliefs and ethnicity into a larger realm of brotherhood and compassion, for it is here that religious denominations and cultural divides dissolve—where the love of God and mankind manifest themselves in a magnificent way. This smooth, beautiful peninsula seems most appropriate to symbolize the universal love of a Supreme Being who embraces all four corners of the earth. Structures erected in this region for more than a century include places

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of worship for Protestants, Catholics, and Latter-day Saints, as well as a small Buddhist temple. It is a place that not only includes a variety of Christian strains but also extends beyond this realm, embracing an array of other views. In a world made up of thousands of religious varieties, the unconditional love and spirit of acceptance that exist on Kalaupapa truly stand as an example to us all.

After passing through some of the most beautiful landscape our eyes had ever beheld, we met LDS Church member Kuulei Bell at the Kalaupapa post office. At that time Kuulei was employed as the Kalaupapa postal clerk. We had a wonderful visit, and it was then that I determined to write a history of the Latter-day Saints in this region. Nearly five years have come and gone since that time, and I am still researching and writing that history. However, after my first visit, I decided that a larger story of Kalaupapa must also be told, the story of valiant patients and volunteers who worked together and inspired each other despite their differing faiths. JoAnna and I went away from our first encounter with this small settlement feeling much the way elder Matthew Cowley felt when he encountered Kalaupapa in the mid-20th century:

*I went there apprehending that I would be depressed. I left knowing that I had been exalted. I had expected that my heart, which is not too strong, would be torn with sympathy, but I went away with a feeling that it had been healed. . . .

I went . . . appreciating my friends, loving my enemies, worshiping God, and with a heart purged of all pettiness. This is a transformation for me and for it I am indebted to the . . . Saints of Kalaupapa.*

Establishment of Kalaupapa

As 1865 dawned, the Hawaiian government’s concern over the disease of leprosy had escalated to the point that King Kamehameha V signed a document intent on preventing the spread of this malicious malady. The writ designated a self-contained region surrounded by natural borders for victims on the eastern portion of the Kalaupapa peninsula, a place called Kalawao. The following year the first patients began arriving.3

Understanding the Disease

Millions of people worldwide are still infected with leprosy, which affects primarily the skin and nerves. However, less than 5 percent of our human population is susceptible to its devastation. In 1873 a Norwegian physician named Dr. Gerhardt Hansen discovered the cause of this sickness, a bacillus, *Mycobacterium leprae,* and, as a result, the illness began to be referred to as Hansen’s disease. In 1981 this name was officially adopted in Hawaii as the medical term for leprosy, which usage patients prefer, since the term *leprosy* possesses a negative stigma in biblical literature, intimating that its victims were unclean.4 Between 1866 and 1969, over 8,000 people were forcibly removed to the Kalaupapa peninsula. By 1969 drugs were developed that arrested the disease, and patients were again free to move abroad as they wished.5

In 1980 Kalaupapa was named a national park. Today about two dozen patients still live in the settlement or in Honolulu at the Hale Mohalu Hospital; with their passing, the park will eventually extend its influence throughout the entire region.

Damien and Napela

In the same year that Dr. Hansen made his medical discovery, two ecclesiastical leaders from different faiths first made their appearance on the Kalaupapa peninsula. One was a Latter-day Saint named Jonathan Hawai Napela; the other was a Belgian priest, Father Damien J. de Veuster, who will be canonized by the Roman Catholic Church in the coming year.6 Napela was born on the island of Maui in 1813, became a district judge in 1848, and converted to Mormonism in 1852. He was a
tremendous aid to early LDS missionary work on the Hawaiian Islands as he fed and housed the elders, helped them learn Hawaiian, and aided George Q. Cannon with the translation of the Book of Mormon into Hawaiian. Though Cannon taught Napela the restored gospel, Napela on several occasions taught Cannon and the Utah elders a greater dimension of faith.

Perhaps his greatest contribution to humankind is his example as a loving husband. When his wife, Kitty, contracted leprosy, or Hansen’s disease, Jonathan chose to remain with her in the settlement and act as her kokua, a Hawaiian word meaning “helper.” Consequently, Jonathan wrote a letter in Hawaiian to the Board of Health, pleading that he might be allowed to stay with his wife:

On August 3, 1843, I took my wife as my legally married wife and on that same day I vowed before God to care for my wife in health and sickness, and until death do us part.

I am 60 years old and do not have much longer to live. During the brief time remaining, I want to be with my wife. My wife has also lived a long life, but with this disease, it will quickly shorten her life. Such is the reason for this petition.

Luckily, Jonathan’s request was granted, and he spent the remaining years of his life at Kalaupapa with Kitty. While here, Napela encountered yet another way to serve those around him. Not long after his arrival, he was called to act as the leader of the LDS Church on the Kalaupapa peninsula, a calling he held from 1873 until his death in 1879 from the effects of Hansen’s disease.

Perhaps not coincidentally, Father Damien arrived at Kalaupapa in the same year the Napelas did. This Belgian priest would eventually gain international fame because of his demonstration of faith and attitude of selfless service on the island, best captured by his own words: “Suppose the disease does get my body, God will give me another one on resurrection day.” From the day of his arrival in 1873 until his death at age 49, his concern was for all the patients, regardless of race or religion. However, the core of his heart seemed to belong to the orphaned children, whom he often led in singing. His Christian service on the Kalaupapa peninsula serves as an important reminder of Elder Orson F. Whitney’s words, offered in a 1921 general conference address:

[God] is using not only his covenant people, but other peoples as well, to consummate a work, stupendous, magnificent, and altogether too arduous for this little handful of Saints to accomplish by and of themselves.

... Other good and great men [and women] have been sent by the Almighty into many nations, to give them, not the fulness of the Gospel, but that portion of truth that they were able to receive and wisely use.

Soon after their arrival at the settlement, Jonathan Napela and Father Damien became acquainted. Both had come to Kalaupapa to serve, and both contracted Hansen’s disease as a result of their charity. Damien was 27 years younger than Napela, and the cultural background of each was very different, yet both were firmly committed to their religious orientations. Though ecclesiastical leaders of different faiths, they became dear friends. In fact, one of their contemporaries who lived at Kalaupapa wrote, “After Father Damien arrived in the Leper Settlement, ... Mr. J. Napela ... and Father Damien were the best of friends.” What makes this relationship particularly unusual is the fact that at this time heated rivalries existed between faiths as they vied for island converts. Yet at Kalaupapa, there seems to have developed a different kind of spiritual terrain nourished by the relationship between these two great men and their commitment to improve the decadent moral
conditions they encountered upon their arrival at the settlement.

**Conditions at Kalaupapa in 1873**

Reporting to the Board of Health on the depraved situation of the patients, Damien wrote:

> They numbered eight hundred and sixteen. Some of them were old acquaintances of mine, from Hawaii, where I was previously stationed. . . . To the majority I was a stranger. . . .
> 
> . . . They all were living at Kalawao. . . .
> 
> . . . They passed their time with playing cards, hula . . . , drinking . . . alcohol . . .
> 
> Their clothes in general were far from being clean and decent. . . .
> 
> The miserable condition of the settlement at that time gave it the name of a living graveyard.13

Damien further noted, “Many an unfortunate woman had to become a prostitute to obtain friends who would take care of her, and the children, when well and strong, were used as servants.”14 Such conditions created a need for these men to unite hands with those patients who desired to improve their spiritual environment.15

**Suffering Influences Spirituality at Kalaupapa**

Through the influence of Damien, Napela, and a number of other avid Christians, reformation soon made headway. Over the years, response to Kalaupapa softened under the strain of the suffering that transpired there. One former patient named Bernard noted that Kalaupapa used to be viewed as “a devil’s island, a gateway to hell, worse than a prison.” Yet he added, “Today it is a gateway to heaven. There is a spirituality to the place. All the sufferings of those whose blood has touched the land—the effect is so powerful even the rain cannot wash it away.”16 Another patient named Makia Malo noted, “They thought it was hell and we thought it was heaven.”17

In interviews, some patients have related how their spirituality has been affected by their Kalaupapa experience, especially as it pertains to prayer. For example, one patient named Nancy Toleno said:

> We were nurtured . . . not just by a Protestant or a Mormon or even Catholic nuns. Everyone worked together. . . . Everyone needed prayers, there were prayers. And I was thankful that I was very close, very close to God. . . . Someone asked, “Do you ask God why?” I said, “No, I don’t.” I just say, “Maybe it’s a wake-up call.” I thank Him. . . . I want people to know, really know the love in the hearts of the people of Kalaupapa. . . . We’ve got hearts. We’ve got hearts.18

Another patient, who came to Kalaupapa at age 14 in 1936, also shared her experience of prayer and the importance of expressing gratitude to God, even in times of adversity:

> God knows best for us. . . . You must keep your faith no matter what comes into your life. You must still be able to thank the Lord for the many other blessings that we receive and keep this faith all the time, no matter what comes into our life. Yeah, ’cause I feel religion is not thanking God when everything is good; religion is thanking God when everything isn’t going right.19

This vertical relationship with the heavens seems to have also affected the horizontal relationships among the patients themselves. Furthermore, several people who have had contact with the Kalaupapa patients have spoken of the unifying effects that appear to be inherent in the suffering of this disease. For example, in his book *Travels to Hawaii*, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote of his visit to Kalaupapa, explaining, “They were strangers to each other, collected by common calamity.”20 Protestant writer Ethel M. Damon noted,
“Surely the isolation of suffering has tended toward obliterating the barriers of difference in religious observance.”21 Reverend James Drew further observed, “They are brothers and sisters here. . . . Leprosy has made sure of that.”22 One Asian patient named Paul Harada echoed this same theme:

*The more we suffer, the more strength we have. The more suffering, the closer we are to one another. Life is that way. If you haven’t suffered, then you don’t know what joy is. The others may know something about joy, but those who have gone through hell and high water, I think they feel the joy deeper.*23

In referring to the Kalaupapa community, this same patient said, “We are all friends,” and he told me that there was an “ecumenical philosophy” in the community.24

**Ecumenical Philosophy at Kalaupapa**

In a number of interviews conducted over the past several years, I have certainly seen and heard indications of the ecumenical attitude at Kalaupapa. For example, Latter-day Saint patient Kuulei Bell related that at times she was recruited to sing in the Catholic choir. Not only has Kuulei sung with a Catholic choir, but she and her dear friend and fellow patient, Lucy Kaona, have made many trips to Father Damien’s church in Kalawao (St. Philomena), three miles from Kalaupapa, to enjoy the chapel’s acoustics and especially to sing to Father Damien as a tribute to his charitable service.25

Another example of ecumenism was related in a humorous way by Richard Marks—a former patient, a Catholic, and the sheriff of Kalaupapa for nearly two decades (with a record of no arrests). In describing the Catholic mass in Kalaupapa at Christmastime, Marks explained, “The Protestants and the Mormons came early and they took the back seats so we had to sit up front.”26 Another Catholic patient, affectionately known by his friends as “Boogie,” noted, “We know all about the things we [the patients] went through. . . . I think that’s one [reason we feel like a family]. . . . When we have a function going on, the whole community just comes together.”27

Apparently this kind of attitude prevailed throughout the 20th century. Latter-day Saint convert Mary Sing recalled, “When I came [to Kalaupapa in 1917] everybody was living just like a family. Nobody says anything bad about the other religion. Everybody was together. See, they respected, you know, each church.” Mary added, “If the Catholic had any party, . . . they wait for the Mormon people to get through with their service. . . . And so [it] is with the Protestant, everybody was made happy.”28

One patient, Edwin Lelepali, known affectionately as “Pali” and a very active member of the Protestant community, recalled, “Us and the Catholic Church and the Mormon Church, we’re always getting together. When it is something big, we always join together and enjoy it.”29 One memorable ecumenical service occurred soon after the Lion’s Club erected a cross at the Kauhako Crater, shortly before the Easter celebration of 1948. One author wrote of the assemblage of different Christian faiths: “The two Mormon Elders assisted Pastor Alice in the service; many Roman Catholics were present. . . . The people sang as never before, their joyous message carrying on the wind even to the sufferers in the hospital at Kalaupapa.”30

Perhaps the most impressive piece of Kalaupapa’s interfaith collaborative work is the construction of various places of worship. For example, Pali expressed his joy and gratitude when members of the settlement joined in 1966 to help restore the Siloama chapel: “We had the Protestants, we had the Catholics, we had the Mormons all chip in to build this Church. . . . They wanted to help this Church. . . . When you came here you could feel the spirit of love. It was special working with them. . . . It was just beautiful. I can never thank them enough.
It was wonderful.”31 When asked if the same was true when a 20th-century Catholic church was erected, he added that everyone joined in “to help raise some funds for the Church. . . . Everybody would help out and that’s how it was in Kalaupapa. That’s what’s so different about Kalaupapa. When somebody needs help, everybody’s there.” Finally, this patient explained, “This is our family. . . . I don’t care what religion. . . . That’s how we felt. When they need help, we [are] there, see? . . . We always go. You don’t have to ask us, we just come out and help. That’s how we were brought up here in Kalaupapa. Somehow that great love for everybody brought us together.”32

The same spirit of love and collaboration that existed during the construction of the Catholic and Protestant churches was also evident in 1965 when a new Latter-day Saint chapel was built to replace the older 1904 chapel, which had deteriorated. When the building was dedicated at the close of the year and the work hours tallied, it was discovered that those of other faiths had actually donated more hours in its construction than the Latter-day Saints had. “All worked hard, and some of those with disabilities had their hands wired to the wheelbarrows that they might do their share.”33 The entire settlement joined in celebration over the knowledge that their LDS friends had a new chapel to worship in.

**Telling the Kalaupapa Story**

In early 2005 I learned that both BYU–Hawaii and Chaminade, a Catholic university in Honolulu, were celebrating their jubilee anniversaries. I approached the presidents of both schools (BYU–Hawaii President Eric B. Shumway and Chaminade President Sue Wesselkamper) about the idea of a joint celebration on each campus and explained that it seemed natural to share this wonderful interfaith story that seemed to have commenced with the friendship between Damien and Napela. They listened attentively and agreed to it.

One important factor that no doubt aided in the acceptance of the proposal was when I initially met with President Wesselkamper and another Chaminade administrator and asked if we could begin our meeting by reading some of the comforting words that had been recently spoken by President Gordon B. Hinckley at the April 2005 general conference regarding the passing of Pope John Paul II. On this occasion President Hinckley stated:

> I extend to our Catholic neighbors and friends our heartfelt sympathy at this time of great sorrow. Pope John Paul II has worked tirelessly to advance the cause of Christianity, to lift the burdens of the poor, and to speak fearlessly in behalf of moral values and human dignity. He will be greatly missed, particularly by the very many who have looked to him for leadership.34

I believe these inspired words helped strengthen a friendship with Chaminade and open the way for the proposal that came to fruition during the fall of 2005. During this period I presented the Kalaupapa story of interfaith collaboration to students and faculty on both campuses as part of the jubilee celebrations. In addition, over the past three years as an Evans Professor of Religious Understanding, I have had the opportunity to share this edifying story at several conferences and with numerous students attending many universities. This story has also encouraged a brotherhood with leaders of different faiths. However, the most tender part of my experience has been getting to know the Kalaupapa community and to feel the spirit of the patients, who are now my friends. A 60-minute documentary directed by Ethan Vincent titled *The Soul of Kalaupapa* will be released next year to tell their story and will be shown at the World Parliament of Religions, to be held in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009.
My Conclusion Is the Message of Inclusion
The charity and uncommon service rendered at Kalaupapa serves as a reminder of the importance of erecting bridges instead of barriers, finding common ground instead of battleground, and valuing one another regardless of ethnicity and religiosity. To me it provides a vivid illustration of the need for Latter-day Saints to not only join hands but also to look outside the circle of our faith’s community and take Elder M. Russell Ballard’s charge seriously to “love one another. Be kind to one another despite our deepest differences.” Such an ecumenical philosophy of inclusiveness seems to be desperately needed in a world that suffers from societal diseases such as selfishness, pride, bigotry, and prejudice. In addition, it is hoped that this short treatise on the Kalaupapa settlement will serve as a reminder of the acute need for each of us to generate light instead of heat and to apply the maxim “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity.”

I testify that I know that God lives and that He loves all of His children. I testify that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes
3. See Linda W. Greene, Exile in Paradise: The Isolation of Hawaii’s Leprosy Victims and Development of Kalaupapa Settlement, 1865 to the Present (Denver: National Park Service, 1985), 51; Greene, whose Exile is the definitive work on the settlement, wrote, “The first group of ‘colonists’ were deposited at Kalawao on January 6, 1866. (Contrary to popular myth, it is doubtful that any of the exiles were forced to jump into the surf and swim to shore as a matter of regular procedure.)”
4. For more about the spread of leprosy in Hawaii, see James H. Brocker, The Lands of Father Damien: Kalaupapa, Molokai, Hawaii (Kaunakakai, Hawaii: James H. Brocker, 1997); see also Leviticus 13–14, which describes rituals in relation to victims who have leprosy that appear to be used widely for any type of abnormal skin condition.
6. Mother Marianne Cope, who served for three decades at Kalaupapa (1888–1918), is also currently being considered for canonization. Like Father Damien, she was fully committed to helping the patients in the Kalaupapa settlement. At the time she was invited to serve in the Sandwich Islands Mission, which included Kalaupapa, Mother Marianne stated, “I am hungry for the work. . . . I am not afraid of any disease, hence it would be my greatest delight to minister to the abandoned lepers.” Five years later, her desires to serve at the leprosy settlement were realized. See letter written from the St. Anthony Convent in Syracuse, New York, on July 12, 1883, by Mother Marianne Cope to Reverend Leonor Fouesnel, in author’s possession. Thanks to Sister Mary Laurence Hanley for providing a copy of this letter, which is also included in a book she coauthored on the page preceding the table of contents in Sister Mary Laurence Hanley, O.S.F., O. A. Bushnell, Pilgrimage and Exile Mother Marianne of Molokai (University of Hawaii Press, 1991).
8. Jonathan and his wife, Kitty, both died from the effects of Hansen’s disease in August 1879. See the Kalawao Death Register, 1879–1880, Hawaii State Archives. For more on

9. In Vital Jourdan, The Heart of Father Damien: 1840–1889, trans. Francis Larkin and Charles Davenport, rev. ed. ([St. Paul]: Guild Press; distributed by Golden Press, New York, 1960), 168. Father Damien, originally named Joseph de Veuster, was born January 3, 1840, in Tremeloo, Belgium. A priest in the Society of the Sacred Hearts of Joseph and Mary, Damien was ordained at Honolulu in 1864. He then spent several years working among the native Hawaiians on the big island of Hawaii. Members of his parish contracted the disease and were sent to Kalawao on the Kalaupapa peninsula. His heart was instilled with a desire to labor among the leprosy settlement, and when the opportunity presented itself, he quickly volunteered. See Gavan Daws, Holy Man: Father Damien of Molokai (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1973), 6, 19, 30–34.

10. Orson F. Whitney, CR, April 1921, 32–33; see also Whitney in Forace Green, comp., Cowley and Whitney on Doctrine (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963), 293.


12. Writing in 1873, the same year that Damien and Napela met, Charles de Varigny wrote that the native Hawaiian “believes the Catholic priest when he describes the Protestant missionary as a wolf in sheep’s clothing; but he also believes the Protestant minister who speaks of the Catholic priest as an idolator, and of his ritual tainted with paganism” (quoted in Tayman, The Colony, 91).


15. It should be understood that not all the patients were in this immoral state. Linda Greene writes, “While in the settlement’s earliest days lawlessness and vice resulting from frustration and despair were rampant, there was also a group of people who had been avid churchgoers in their former lives” (Exile in Paradise, 55). A group of 35 of these Protestant patients at the close of 1866 formed a church called the Church of the Healing Spring. In fact, it would be a Protestant minister (Pastor Heulu) and his deacons who would pave the way for Damien, as many in the settlement first shunned him upon arrival. When Father Damien was shunned when he arrived at the colony, these Protestants urged their congregation and all patients to accept him. See Ethel M. Damon, Siloama, The Church of the Healing Spring: The Story of Certain Almost Forgotten Protestant Churches (Honolulu: Hawaiian Board of Missions, 1948), 18.


17. Personal communication.


21. Ethel M. Damon, Siloama, 84.


36. Philip Schaff, in History of the Christian Church, 7 vols. in 8 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916–23), 6:650, explains, “This famous motto . . . is often falsely attributed to St. Augustine . . . but is of much later origin . . . The authorship has recently been traced to Rupertus Meldenius, an otherwise unknown divine.” Elder B. H. Roberts used this quote (though he did not identify the author) in an October 1912 general conference address (see B. H. Roberts, CR, October 1912, 30).

For more information, visit http://fredewoods.googlepages.com/home.