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Keeping Promises: The LDS Church Enters Bulgaria, 1990–1994

Opening Bulgaria to LDS missionaries is a story of public service and personal interaction that bore good fruit through helping needy people improve their personal conditions.

Kahlile Mehr

Introduction

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had long anticipated the day it would be allowed to extend its message to the people behind the Iron Curtain. When Communist power began to evaporate, Latter-day Saint missionaries quickly entered Hungary (1987), Poland (1988), East Germany and Estonia (1989), and Russia, Czechoslovakia, and Romania (1990). In contrast, however, the door opened more slowly in Bulgaria, where the first representatives of the Church were volunteers assigned to teach English rather than preach the gospel as proselyting missionaries.¹

In 1989, Bulgaria was a Communist nation with a Christian tradition but no Bibles. During the five centuries Bulgaria had been ruled by the Ottoman empire, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church had played an important role in saving Bulgarian culture. Monasteries helped stave off Turkish assimilation by preserving the Bulgarian language, literature, and religion. In 1878 the Bulgarians shed the Ottoman yoke with military assistance from the Russians, but in 1944 their liberators became their captors. The Soviet army rumbled into Bulgaria and, like the Ottomans, installed a regime that attempted to efface Bulgaria’s Christian past.

Bulgaria was one of the most loyal of the satellite states under Soviet Communist hegemony. Nevertheless, on November 11, 1989,
two days after the dramatic fall of the Berlin Wall, Todor Zhivkov, the Communist Party leader in Bulgaria for thirty-five years, was arrested and forced to resign. The nation installed a more democratic regime, opening the door not only for political reform, but also for religious and social reawakening.

The Communists had eliminated Bibles, but vestiges of Christianity had survived to nurture a revival of faith. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church of the pre-Communist past reemerged, and many other religions from outside the country began to establish themselves in Bulgaria. The LDS Church arrived in Bulgaria not only with a spiritual message, but also with temporal assistance—English teachers and humanitarian service workers, who brought much welcome assistance to a country struggling with the leviathan task of reentering a world from which it had long been isolated.

Because the ability to speak English is highly valued in much of the world, missionaries from the United States have often shared their language, as well as their faith, by teaching English classes. Indeed, English classes are commonly taught in many LDS missions. In Bulgaria, however, the primary purpose of the first missionaries sent in 1990 was to teach English in Bulgarian schools. While teaching their language, these volunteers shared their beliefs and tapped a wellspring of curiosity in a nation long denied public religious observance. The arrival of these English teachers—gospel preachers was the first milestone in recent Church history in Bulgaria.

In a matter of months, the English-teaching missionaries were followed by full-time proselyting missionaries, who were in turn followed just as quickly by another type of Church representative—the humanitarian service worker. The Church had long provided temporal assistance for its members in need, but beginning in the 1980s, more of its humanitarian work was focused on the underprivileged regardless of religion. Since 1985 the Church has increasingly asked older Church members to donate their knowledge and skills to nations needing medical, educational, or other humanitarian assistance. These missionaries work under the direction of Area Presidencies or Church headquarters and coordinate their work with mission presidents. Bulgaria was included in this evolving program.
Official Contact

Even though no official LDS Church organization existed in Bulgaria in 1990, the country was under the jurisdiction of the Austria Vienna East Mission, directed by President Dennis Neuen schwander. Elder Hans B. Ringger was president of the Europe Area, and from 1985 to 1990, Elder Russell M. Nelson had the assignment of overseeing the Church in Eastern Europe. During this period, these three leaders were frequent visitors to the Eastern European countries—emissaries to the newly self-directed governments emerging from the moribund autocracies of Communism.

Some missionaries and Church leaders responsible for establishing the Church in Bulgaria. April 23, 1991, Sofia, Bulgaria. Left to right: Bryan Meyer, an elder transferred from Yugoslavia to Bulgaria; Dennis B. Neuenschwander, who was president of the Austria Vienna East Mission, which had jurisdiction over Bulgaria; Hans B. Ringger, president of the Europe Area; Elder Dallin H. Oaks, who replaced Elder Russell M. Nelson in overseeing the Church in Eastern Europe; Christian Elggren, an elder transferred from Germany to Bulgaria; Matthew Smith, one of the first missionaries specifically called to Bulgaria; and Mikeal Olsen, another elder transferred from Yugoslavia to Bulgaria. Courtesy Christian Elggren.
Elder Nelson and Elder Ringger visited Sofia in October 1988. The government was still Communist, and Tsviatko Tsvetkov of the religious affairs department was unimpressed. Through his interpreter, he said, “Nelson? Ringger? Mormons? I’ve never heard of you.” Elder Nelson replied, “That makes us even. We have never heard of you, either. It’s time we got acquainted.” They did, but much was left undone. When the two returned to Sofia in February 1990, the government was no longer Communist, and the reception was more cordial. They met with many government and media representatives.3 Desiring to help the Bulgarian people and hoping to establish the Church in Bulgaria, Elder Nelson decided to try the approach he had used in other Eastern European nations.4 Rather than asking the Bulgarian government what they could do for the Church, he asked instead what service the Church could render the Bulgarians. The answer was surprising but simple—send English teachers.5

Elders Nelson and Ringger concluded their visit to Bulgaria in the Park of Liberty in Sofia on February 13, 1990. They were accompanied by Baird King, a Church member then working at the U.S. Embassy; his wife, Susan; and their family. There, in a peaceful grove, enfolded by fog and surrounded by softly falling snow, Elder Nelson offered a dedicatory prayer for the preaching of the gospel in Bulgaria and a blessing of hope for a better day in which the nation would develop in peace—politically, economically, and socially.6

The English Teachers

The request for English teachers to go to Bulgaria came to the desk of Ross Ekins at Church headquarters in Salt Lake City. He was responsible for processing the paperwork connected with the assignment of missionary couples. Concurrently, Morris and Annetta Mower, a retired couple intent on serving a mission, contacted Roy King, a former acquaintance and a director in the missionary department, to inquire about possibilities for missionary service. King referred the Mowers to Ross Ekins. Morris held a doctorate in education and was a retired principal. Annetta was a nurse and had also worked as a schoolteacher. They discussed the possibility of
Bulgarian service, and before the Mowers left, they agreed to accept an assignment in Bulgaria if it was offered. Their call to Bulgaria soon came.  

Another couple, Delbert and Marilyn Fowler, were also called to serve in Bulgaria. Delbert Fowler had been a high-school principal in Salt Lake City. Marilyn had taught one year of high school. They were not seeking a mission call when they were interviewed by their stake president. Their names had been suggested by George Brooks, a newly appointed mission president, who had been the personnel manager of the Salt Lake City School District. The Fowlers accepted the call.

Meanwhile, the Mowers, in downtown Salt Lake City to complete their missionary paperwork, coincidentally met Elder Nelson outside the Church Office Building. Learning of their call to Bulgaria, he invited them to his office, where he told them they would not only teach English, but also teach the gospel and baptize, and he predicted that people would come to them seeking religious guidance.

The Mowers energetically made preparations. Packing was a major undertaking because they wanted to include substantial amounts of Church literature as well as English texts. They scrupulously stowed away the ninety pounds permitted each airline passenger, which was nonetheless twenty pounds in excess of what was permitted in Europe without paying a surcharge. While at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, for a week of training, the Mowers and the Fowlers went to Utah Valley Community College to observe classes taught in English as a second language.

On September 9, 1990, the two couples departed Salt Lake City en route to New York. On takeoff from Denver, the plane blew a tire. They now faced the exhausting trial of making new connections. Meanwhile, a fifth English teacher, Judith Gubler, who had also accepted a call to Bulgaria, was scheduled to connect in New York with the two couples from Salt Lake, but no one came.

A schoolteacher from Provo, Utah, Sister Gubler felt the desire to serve a mission even though she was older than the usual single missionary. After submitting her mission papers, she sought confirmation of her feelings while attending a temple session. The response was clear and unequivocal. She heard the words, “You
are needed now.” In her mind’s eye, she saw people who did not look American. She was confused when her mission call came and it was to North Carolina.¹¹

Sister Gubler’s feeling of disquiet grew when she was asked to extend her stay at the Missionary Training Center in order to receive family history training. She had been in North Carolina for just a week and a half when the missionary department called and explained that her assignment was being changed to Bulgaria, where they needed English instructors. She knew that this was where she was needed.

Sister Gubler arrived in Vienna alone. President and Sister Neuenschwander met her with a bouquet of flowers and asked the whereabouts of the others, for news of the mishap in Denver had not yet reached Vienna. The president told her the Church had been trying all year to set up the English instruction program but had encountered delays because of turmoil in the new government. He added that he had been praying for English teachers.

Sister Gubler later met her first mission companion, Rose Marie Daigle, from Maine, who had been working as a companion to an older Church member in Finland. Sister Daigle’s Finnish visa had been about to expire, and she had been looking for an opportunity to serve elsewhere when she learned of the opportunity to teach English in Bulgaria.

The Mowers and the Fowlers finally arrived, and the group of six departed by plane for Sofia on September 12, 1990. Representatives of the hosting organization, the Saints Cyril and Methodius International Foundation, were at the airport to greet them and transport them to their assignments. The single sisters were taken to Smolyan, site of the Bulgarian National School of Language. The Fowlers were sent to teach in a high school north of Sofia at Pravets, the birthplace of Todor Zhivkov. The Mowers were assigned to Sofia.

Teaching English in Sofia. The realization they were in totally foreign circumstances began to sink in as the Mowers encountered their first challenges. The former residents of the apartment that had been secured in their behalf by the foundation had not entirely moved out when they arrived. When the Mowers were finally in the apartment, the lights went off. At the time, it was a common occurrence to have insufficient electrical power to service all customers twenty-four hours a day. Since it was already dark, the Mowers decided to go out to eat. They were seated at a table for six, where, in the usual Bulgarian manner, four seats were already occupied. Since they knew no Bulgarian, they ordered by pointing and were served a dish made primarily of sour cheese, a taste they were definitely unaccustomed to. They arrived back at the apartment before the lights came on, found stubby candles but no matches, and resigned themselves to an evening in the dark.

Two interpreters from the foundation took them on a city tour the next day. As they passed the U.S. embassy, Baird King emerged. He had been alerted by his parents, acquaintances of the Mowers, of the imminent arrival of the missionary couple. All felt mutual comfort in a newly found friend so far from home. King inquired, “Who told you what to bring?” Elder Mower answered, “No one.” King responded, “This is going to be a hard winter.” And it was. The food stores were empty. Food lines for cheese, bread, and eggs
were long, the wait tedious, and the Mowers had no time to waste. The first winter was the toughest of their stay. Yet these circumstances soon waned into insignificance as they began to teach.

The Mowers began teaching on September 24, 1990. They could have hardly anticipated the conditions they encountered at the first class. The chalk was so hard as to be virtually useless, and the chalkboard had a surface like cement. There were no erasers; they had to wash the board with a sponge or rag and wait for the water to evaporate. The windows were broken. There was no heat. There were no books except those they had brought. The podium was a rickety platform. The class was comprised of young adults at the graduate level preparing for a Graduate Record Examination that would permit them to study abroad. They sat at grade school desks. When the weather turned colder, Elder Mower decided to move the class to the Mowers’ apartment, where accommodations were better. The class lasted three hours a day for two weeks.

Sister Mower started teaching separately during the second week, doubling their teaching capacity. They taught several different classes a day, sometimes in rotation with Bulgarian teachers of English. The classes lasted for two, four, or six weeks. The Mowers were told a week before each class where they would teach next. They would walk to class or use public transportation. Sister Mower even taught in an army installation. They taught evenings as well as days, and they rendered their service gratis. The classes grew quickly, but the Mowers managed the heavy work load. What was particularly inspirational to them was that, in spite of not knowing the language, they were always able to make appointments, deal with the customs, and run into people they needed to contact. They saw the hand of the Lord constantly with them in small matters.

Elder Mower stumbled upon another way to help their students. When he unpacked, to his surprise he found five boxes of personal checks and no neckties. He knew he had intended to pack the ties and certainly not the checks. He could see no value in them until he learned that the English testing service at the U.S. embassy would not accept payment in Bulgarian currency. U.S. dollars could not be bought in Bulgaria at the time. After reviewing
the instructions from the testing service, Elder Mower discovered they would accept U.S. checks. As a service to his students, he paid for their tests, and they returned the payment to him in Bulgarian money at the official rate of exchange. Before U.S. dollars became available to Bulgarians, the Mowers went through four boxes of checks.17

Whatever their success in teaching English, the missionaries' efforts to establish the Church flourished. Four members lived in Bulgaria when the English teachers arrived: Dr. Kafeero G. Williams, from Uganda, baptized in London and attending medical school in Sofia; Ivan Miranov, baptized in Hungary and married to a Bulgarian; Gabor Todorov, baptized in Switzerland while attending school; and Snegina Filipova, baptized in France.18 When the Mowers' assignment concluded in March 1992, they left a Church membership of several hundred and a mission that had the third-highest baptismal rate in Europe.19

The Mowers exerted a religious influence through their English instruction. Because no restriction was placed on the subject of their classes, they incorporated Church literature into their lessons. Because of the long absence of religion from Bulgarian culture, the discussion of religion piqued the interest of many students.

President Neuenschwander visited Sofia the weekend after the first English class. He proposed holding a fireside to which the Mowers would invite their students. Twenty came, as well as Snegina Filipova, one of the four Bulgarian members of the Church. President Neuenschwander, who holds a doctorate, described graduate school and then taught from the scriptures. The reactions were mixed. One student said the Joseph Smith story sounded like a fantasy; another, Mirella Lazarova, asked to learn more.

On October 14, 1990, a month after arriving in Bulgaria, the Mowers held a Church service in their apartment and invited their students. Twenty-three came. Mirella Lazarova interpreted for Sister Mower, and Kafeero Williams interpreted for Elder Mower. In later Church meetings, students from the English classes taught Church lessons even though they were not yet members. Within a month, fifty-four people were attending Church services, leaving standing room only.
The Mowers also made contacts in food lines. One day while waiting in a food line, a woman, eager to speak English, helped them understand the price of bread. The Mowers invited her to church. She later served as a pianist and a chorister. In another food line, they met a woman who accepted their invitation to go to church and brought her granddaughter. At the time, the child’s mother was in Italy, where she had joined the Church. The grandmother was very upset at her daughter’s conversion until she met the Mowers and became better acquainted with the Church. She was baptized and became one of the first Relief Society teachers and a translator of lesson materials.

On November 14, 1990, four proselyting missionaries arrived in Bulgaria, and, on November 24, six converts were baptized in the first Bulgarian baptismal service. Among those baptized were Mirella Lazarova and her husband, Ventsislav Lazarov.20 Ventsislav was later called as one of the first branch presidents, and Mirella as one of the first Relief Society presidents.21

The Mowers coordinated their efforts with the proselyting missionaries. They arranged for the missionaries to attend the English classes, adding a new dimension to the lessons. One missionary, for instance, told the students about his experiences rock climbing, rappelling, and camping in America. The Mowers were assertive, and the Bulgarians seemed to accept that approach. In the words of an early convert, “They were aggressive in a good way.”22

Food was scarce during the first winter. In Sofia the Mowers did not know what they would be able to buy or when they would be able to buy it. Yet, in Elder Mower’s words, “We were fed by the ravens.”23 An American of Bulgarian descent, Victor Coy, who was a member of the Church, came to visit his cousins in Bulgaria during Christmas. He brought food and shared it with the missionaries. He even went to Greece and brought back food. Baird King also carried in food from Greece, and President Neuenschwander brought in food from Vienna. Still, the Mowers were down to a few onions, potatoes, and some dried milk in late February 1991, when John Dinkelman, an embassy employee in Belgrade, and four missionaries from Yugoslavia drove through a snowstorm to bring in a vanload of food. The Kings also left the Mowers their excess food

when they left the country in March 1991. In spite of the “ravens,” Elder Mower lost thirty pounds during the first winter.24

**Teaching English in Pravets.** The food situation was not as dire in Pravets, where the Fowlers taught at an elite boarding school. There they could eat at least one meal a day with the students. Still, they faced challenges. Whisked away upon arrival, the Fowlers found themselves isolated in a small village, totally unlike the metropolis where they had lived in Utah. However, they had little time to ponder their fate, for they immediately immersed themselves in teaching English. They found some comfort in the fact that they could converse with four Bulgarian English teachers at the school.25

The school accepted approximately twelve hundred students with high achievement test scores from throughout the country and focused on training them in the use of computers. A computer company stood adjacent to the school, and some students were employed part-time in computer manufacturing.
Elder Fowler taught third- and fourth-year students, while his wife taught second-year students. In contrast to most schools in the U.S., in Pravets the teachers rather than the students moved from class to class. This custom caused considerable hardship for the older couple, who had to lug their materials up and down stairs. Unlike the Mowers, the Fowlers were unable to offer their services gratis because their salaries would have been dropped from the school budget had they not accepted the money. However, they used their salaries to benefit the school, buying hard-to-obtain supplies, such as tape recorders, in Sofia and donating them to the school. The Fowlers had the same problem with hard chalk as had the Mowers, but they solved the problem by shipping chalk in from Utah.

The main hardship for the Fowlers was their isolation. They went to Sofia at least monthly to, in Elder Fowler’s words, “recover their sanity” and to help in Church services. In Pravets they had only each other. They were told not to teach the gospel to the students unless the parents were present. As the parents lived elsewhere, the Fowlers did not proselyte. They had served in Pravets for seven months, when, in March 1991, they were temporarily transferred to Vienna. In Vienna, they learned how to manage a mission office and then returned to Sofia in June 1991 to establish and run the mission office of the newly created Bulgaria Sofia Mission.

Teaching English in Smolyan. The sisters in Smolyan also fared well in a boarding school where food was available. Smolyan is located on the southern border of Bulgaria, about six hours by bus from Sofia. The sisters taught in the Ivan Vasov Language School, which included grades two through high school. German and English were the principal languages taught. The language school was also an elite school, accepting annually only about fifty out of two thousand applicants. As in Pravets, students qualified for admittance through exams. Sister Gubler taught English classes for eighth and eleventh grades. Sister Daigle taught ninth and tenth grades. They, like the Fowlers, accepted salaries to preserve the school’s budget and returned the money to the school in supplies. They also expanded their students’ cultural experiences. For instance, they imported bats, mitts, and baseballs from Utah and taught their students how to play baseball.26
Sister Gubler did not leave religion out of the classroom. She may have been the first person to teach the Bible as literature in a public school in Bulgaria since the advent of Communism in that country, and she did it at the insistence of the students. When the students invited her to meet their families, who lived out of town, Sister Gubler explained that on Sunday she needed to study the Bible as well as hold Church services with Sister Daigle. The students were shocked that she had a Bible. One boy said, "When they come to take you away, you call me and I will protect you." They asked permission to attend her Church services, and on the first Sunday, fourteen students came to the missionaries' apartment.

When school officials learned of her weekend activities, they summoned her to explain. "The students asked," she offered in her defense, and then she reminded the officials that it may do little good to tell teenagers what they could not do. The board decided that if the students were that curious they would allow her to teach the Bible in school where they could observe. They had only one qualification—that she teach the Bible without a religious emphasis. She said that was not possible. They suggested that the subject not be brought to their attention again, so the discussion stopped, but the classes continued.

Along with English classes, the sisters taught classes in the evenings: culture one night a week, music on another, and the Bible on another. They continued to hold meetings on Sunday, and the number attending grew. When twenty students were coming, they started looking for another place to hold meetings. Assistance came through a dentist, who was curious about why Americans were in Smolyan. He arranged for the group to meet in the library of the dental clinic. Eventually, school officials let them meet on school premises in the music room so that they could have a piano. When German-speaking missionaries arrived later, the group held services in three languages, and students interpreted between Bulgarian, German, and English. When the group reached forty-five people, the Church authorized them to rent a facility in the youth center.

The Proselyting Missionaries

The first four proselyting missionaries to enter Bulgaria were serving in other countries when they were assigned to Bulgaria.
Two were from Yugoslavia, then part of the Austria Vienna East Mission, and had been speaking a language similar to Bulgarian. The other two missionaries were serving in Germany. Together, the combined skills of the missionaries prepared the way for a much larger contingent of missionaries to follow.

When David Garner entered the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, in the fall of 1989, the Berlin Wall was still standing, and the Communist world was still a reality. His call was to Yugoslavia. Little did he realize he would be serving in more than one Communist country. On Sunday evening, November 11, 1990, the anniversary of Todor Zhivkov's arrest, President Dennis Neuen schwander phoned Elder Garner to extend a new assignment as the district leader over the first Bulgarian missionary district. The most experienced Serbo-Croatian speaker, he would be the senior elder of those entering Bulgaria. The announcement was so surprising and unexpected that after the telephone call Elder Garner turned pale and shook for at least fifteen minutes.27 Elder Trent Warner had served in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, for eight months when he received his telephone call from President Neuenschwander that Sunday evening. All Elder Warner knew of Bulgaria was that it produced catsup sold in Yugoslavia. Elder Garner and Elder Warner reported to Vienna the following Tuesday.28

When Christian Elggren entered the Missionary Training Center for the Germany Frankfurt Mission in January 1990, he witnessed the excitement of missionaries receiving calls to enter the former Communist world. Many hoped to be included in the excitement of serving in countries that they had grown up thinking were forbidden. Elder Elggren served eight months in Germany. On Monday, November 12, 1990, he was attending a district missionary meeting in Kaiserslautern when his president, David Wirthlin, phoned and announced his assignment to Bulgaria. The missionary was numbed by the realization that he was now one of those chosen to open another part of the former Communist domain to the Latter-day Saint faith.29

Elder Elggren knew little of the Bulgarians. A Romanian convert in Germany had told him that all emigré Bulgarians were former KGB agents fleeing from the reforms in their homeland. With little success, he had taught a few Bulgarians and had formed
negative opinions based on that limited contact. He therefore thought it was ironic that he had been chosen. Elder Elggren left for Frankfurt the next morning. He was joined by Elder Timothy Kuta, who had been serving in Frankfurt and had also received the surprising call to Bulgaria the previous day. President Wirthlin blessed the missionaries and put them on a plane to Vienna, Austria.

President Neuenschwander brought the German elders from the airport to the mission home just as the elders from Yugoslavia walked in from the train station. The president explained the prospects. They would be isolated in a poor and unsettled nation and would be given no allowance for failing to abide by the gospel they preached. He told them that their time was precious and that they needed to learn the language and customs as rapidly as possible in order to help the new missionaries now being called to Bulgaria. They stocked up on canned foods, soup mixes, toilet paper, sleeping bags, and other supplies. On Wednesday they departed.

The foursome entered Bulgaria on student visas because the Church did not yet have legal status in Bulgaria. They were hosted by the Saints Cyril and Methodius Foundation as an extension of the agreement that had brought in the English teachers. The foundation arranged for quarters and assigned them to two Bulgarian instructors—two women who spoke neither English nor German. Their textbooks were entirely in Bulgarian; bilingual dictionaries were scarce and had to be shared. Because Serbo-Croatian is related to Bulgarian, the two Yugoslavian missionaries provided a tenuous ability to communicate. For two months, the missionaries studied six hours a day, four days a week. In the evenings, they taught gospel discussions to students from the Mowers’s English classes or to Bulgarians who had encountered the Church while traveling abroad. With his nascent understanding of the language, Elder Garner attempted to teach in Bulgarian a week after arriving. Until they obtained some mastery of the new language, the other missionaries taught in English, German, or Serbo-Croatian.

Originally the missionaries were to provide humanitarian service after they mastered the language, but at the end of their training this service was not requested. Consequently, since they were there, they taught. They did not proselyte in public. There was no
Food supplies brought into Bulgaria by the elders. 1990, Sofia. Standing behind their supplies are (left to right) Elders Timothy Kuta, David Garner, and Trent Warner. Courtesy Christian Elggren.
The elders’ first day in Bulgaria. 1990, Sofia. *Left to right:* David Garner, Christian Elggren, Timothy Kuta, President Dennis B. Neuenschwander (who had accompanied them to Sofia to help orient them), and Trent Warner. Courtesy Christian Elggren.

tracting door-to-door, no street contacting with displays, and no attempts to reach contacts through the media. They did not wear nametags. Still, they taught a constant flow of people as the interest generated by the Mowers spread through the students to relatives and friends. People were curious about the missionaries from America, and for some, the spiritual message the elders promoted brought hope for a better future.

The missionaries worked in a grim world of stark architecture, polluted air, and darkly clothed people hunkered in endless food lines. The entire stock of the central department store in Sofia consisted of some tools and blue work clothes. Eating establishments offered only one entrée and only a relatively few people had enough money to eat out. One had to get up early and stand in line to purchase meat. For one hour out of three, the electricity was
off. To Elder Elggren, initially everything seemed dead. But for him, the shock, the gloom, and the sadness quickly dissipated as he became involved in the lives of the people. The missionaries quickly discovered Bulgarian hospitality. Of her own volition, the coordinator of the Bulgarian classes stood in line for two hours to buy the missionaries some bologna. Although food was in short supply, the people they visited would always feed them, even when the missionaries requested that they not do so.

The missionaries found many opportunities to converse with people on the streets. A missionary would say to a person at a bus stop or on a bus, “Do you mind if I talk with you? I’m from America, and I’m trying to learn your language.” Inevitably the conversation would lead to religion. One couple who wanted to learn more invited the missionaries straight off the bus into their home.

Interest in religion ran high at the time, and the missionaries were constantly occupied with teaching. On December 8, 1990, Elder Elggren reported in his journal that there were thirty-five investigators at church. He lamented that “with our language class, we don’t have enough time to teach them all.” On January 12, 1991, President Neuenschwander spoke to 230 people at a fireside. Elder Mower introduced the missionaries individually and invited people to ask them questions, and many did. By January 27, there were eighty-five investigators at church, although Church membership stood at only fifteen. On February 9, six more investigators were baptized. Elder Elggren commented in his journal, “I have no doubt in my mind that these people were prepared to begin the work here and to be the future leaders. The level of spiritual sensitivity is awesome. What a great blessing it is to be a messenger of the true gospel in this choice land with these people.”

In March, Elder Elggren wrote:

We have over 200 referrals to look up and this weekend Pres. Ringger of the Quorum of Seventy is coming down to speak at the National Palace of Culture to (get this) get us more contacts! We also had a full page article on us in the newspaper with a picture of the Salt Lake temple, Lehi and family on the ship and Elder Mower. It’s called adding injury to pain. We can’t do all.

The Lamanite Generation, a Brigham Young University performing group, went to Bulgaria in June 1991. As no one was buying...
tickets, the Mowers bought a thousand tickets and gave them to former students, missionaries, neighbors, and people they had met in customs, the post office, the airport, or anywhere else. They generated an audience of two thousand. The sisters in Smolyan supported the group’s production in Plovdiv. The performances provided Bulgarians a new perspective on the Church as more than a Sunday affair, produced many investigators, and created a great deal of goodwill. Among those whose baptisms were generated by the visit of the Lamanite Generation was Lyubomir Traikov, who later became the first Bulgarian to serve as a missionary for the Church.

In February 1991, two more missionaries, Elder Bryan Meyer and Elder Mikeal Olsen, were transferred from Yugoslavia to join the four in Bulgaria. The tensions in Yugoslavia would soon erupt into a civil war, temporarily terminating any possibility of teaching a gospel of peace there. Meanwhile, the first group of missionaries specifically called to Bulgaria arrived at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, on February 13, 1991—the first anniversary of Elder Nelson’s dedicatory prayer in the Park of Liberty. They were Elders Matthew Smith, Benjamin Allred, Brian Felt, and Joel Flood.

The Kiriakovs

When the first missionaries to be sent to Bulgaria entered the Missionary Training Center, they were greeted by Julia Kiriakova
Caswell, a native Bulgarian. The ability to speak Bulgarian was a rare skill in a church only recently permitted to enter that country, and Julia, who was a member of the Church, had accepted an invitation to move from Virginia to Provo for the purpose of teaching her native tongue to the missionaries.\(^53\)

In 1963 the Kiriakov family—parents Kiril and Nevenka and children Julia and Peter—were living in Sofia. The father, Kiril, was a dental technician. When Kiril learned that a post in Algeria was available, he applied. Praying for the first time in his life, he asked that he would be able to take his family to Algeria. Six other people in Kiril’s section also applied. To avoid conflict in determining who should go, the seven colleagues decided to draw slips of paper—six “noes” and one “yes”—out of a hat. Kiril drew the “yes” slip. The others protested. They drew a second time, and again Kiril drew the “yes.” The group insisted on seven draws in all—demanding new slips, blindfolding Kiril, having someone else draw for him, and finally making him draw last. At every draw, Kiril’s slip said, “Yes.” The group finally abided by their agreement.\(^54\)

After completing his assignment in Algeria, Kiril applied for a visa to vacation in France. His unspoken intent was to flee. The Bulgarian embassy granted him a visa but would not grant visas to his family. Julia offered a solution. She had been taught to forge signatures in school as part of the training offered Bulgarian children in anticipation of them defrauding their foes in the West. She forged the words “and family” on the visa after the name of the father.\(^55\) In the confusion following an attempted coup, the authorities granted the whole family visas, and the Kiriakovs escaped to France. Eventually, the Bulgarian intelligence network located them and repeatedly sent letters threatening them with death if they did not return.

The Kiriakovs had been struggling with poverty and fear for nearly one year in France when the LDS missionaries knocked on their door. The family were baptized in June 1966. Julia was eventually awarded a scholarship to Brigham Young University, and in 1969 the Kiriakovs immigrated to the U.S. In November 1989, it was Julia, broadcasting from Washington, D.C., over the Voice of America, who informed the Bulgarian people and the world that Bulgaria was no longer a Communist nation.
Kiril’s patriarchal blessing informed him that he would one day preach the gospel to his people in Bulgaria. It was not pleasant to anticipate returning to a country in which the sentence of death for Kiril and of life imprisonment for Nevenka still hung over them because of their defection. Then, in 1991, Kiril lay in a hospital bed with a gangrenous leg. The surgeon intended to amputate it, but Kiril, knowing that he was still to preach the gospel in Bulgaria, refused the operation and requested a blessing from his local priesthood leaders. The next morning, he walked out of the hospital, and two days later he received a call to serve as mission president in Bulgaria. While Julia taught Bulgarian to the missionaries in Provo, her father prepared to serve as their mission president.

A New Mission

In April 1991, the missionaries taught by Julia and others in Provo arrived in Bulgaria. The first sister missionary assigned to proselyte, Raylyn Hales, arrived in June. The nucleus of the missionary corps was in place for the creation of a new mission. On July 1, 1991, the Austria Vienna East Mission was largely dismantled. Bulgaria Sofia became a separate mission. Romania was transferred to the Hungary Budapest Mission, and Yugoslavia to the Austria Vienna Mission, leaving only Ukraine within the earlier mission’s boundaries. Austria Vienna East Mission President Dennis B. Neuenchwander had been sustained as a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy in April conference. In July he began to serve as a counselor in the Europe Area Presidency. Thus he continued to play a role in Bulgaria but now as a support to the new mission president, Kiril Kiriakov.

Because of legal considerations, the Church came into Bulgaria not as a church, but as an association. In January 1991, Elder Mower began the process of filing and refiled the papers necessary to resolve the various questions and objections of the government so it would grant official recognition to the Church. A petition for recognition was signed by Church members in Bulgaria and submitted in April 1991. The Saints Cyril and Methodius Foundation leaders used their influence on behalf of the Church; they had a critical impact on the final recognition, which was granted July 10, 1991, just after the arrival of President Kiriakov. The Church
was registered in the name of Bulgarian resident Ventsislav Lazarov. Elder Elggren recorded in his journal, "Today the church was registered! What does that mean. We wear tags, we contact, we tract!" After the Church was legally recognized, the missionaries could set up a street display and, typically, within two hours fill up their schedule for a week.

On September 8, 1991, Elder Boyd K. Packer and Elder Dallin H. Oaks visited Bulgaria. A church service, attended by 355 people, was held at the National Palace of Culture. The membership had now surpassed a hundred. As Elder Elggren reported, "Even the atheists were listening."

President Kiriakov served for six months before being released because of poor health. On his way to Bulgaria, he had slipped in a Zurich hotel bathtub and broken two ribs, though the extent of his injury was not known until he arrived in Bulgaria. This and other medical problems led to his early release in January 1992. President Neuenschwander confirmed that the Lord had kept his promise that President Kiriakov would preach to his people and that he had set an example for future missionaries by accepting the call to serve.

Elder Mower served as acting mission president during February 1992. In March, Dale Warner, the new mission president, arrived with his wife, Renée. President Warner had been an educational administrator and Russian teacher in the Weber County School District in Ogden, Utah, where he had been Dennis Neuenschwander's first Russian teacher. Sister Warner had taught geography and history.

In 1990 the Warners had initially been considered for service as English teachers in Bulgaria, but Elder Nelson had changed the assignment when he became aware of Brother Warner's Russian language skill. The Warners were the first missionaries called to the Finland Helsinki East Mission, which was being formed to oversee the preaching of the gospel in Russia.

The Warners served eighteen months in Finland and Russia. They had been home only two days when Brother Warner received a call from Elder Dallin H. Oaks, who asked the couple to visit him in Salt Lake City. They went, thinking that Elder Oaks wanted a report on their service in Russia. Instead, Elder Oaks called them
to serve in the land to which they had nearly been called two years previously. Entering Bulgaria in March 1992, President Warner provided the administrative skill needed to organize inexperienced members, young missionaries, and Church service workers into a united functioning whole.

Meanwhile, another couple was being called to replace the Fowlers, who were in the mission office. During the 1991 October general conference, Keith Hansen, who was living in Logan, Utah, took particular notice of Elder Nelson’s talk calling for more missionaries, and he and his wife discussed serving a mission. That same day, while his wife was away, Keith received a call from Church headquarters asking the Hansens to go on a mission to Eastern Europe. Later, he had a hard time convincing his wife that they had received such a call. They preceded the Warners by two months, arriving in January 1992.65

The First Members

Following the 6 baptisms in 1990 were 147 more in 1991.66 As of October 1992, 167 more people had been baptized for a total of 320 members. Missionaries worked in Sofia, Plovdiv, and Smolyan. There were four branches in Sofia and groups in Plovdiv and Smolyan.

Fledgling Relief Society and Young Women programs were initiated by the sister missionaries in 1991. By this time in Sofia were twelve sister missionaries.67 Sister Warner, assisted particularly by Sister Leslie Ann Davis, began to direct the work of the sister missionaries in strengthening Young Women organizations and developing Relief Society programs.68 Elder Mark James helped establish the Primary program.69

By early 1994, the number of branches in Sofia had doubled, and they were organized into two districts. The groups in Plovdiv and Smolyan had become branches. The membership stood at approximately eight hundred.70

The Church had a profound effect on the lives of many of the new members. Mirella and Ventsislav Lazarova were two of the first to be baptized. When Mirella gave up coffee, her mother teased her unmercifully. Yet Mirella persisted in her beliefs, and
her mother eventually became a faithful member who strengthened the daughter she once teased. Mirella’s gospel experience taught her to love people even when she disapproved of their conduct. The gospel gave her hope for something better than the banality of her environment.71

During October and November of 1990, Olia Botcheva attended the second English class taught by the Mowers. She knew more English than most and could communicate well with her teachers. They invited her to church, but she felt strange about going because she had little conception of what “church” meant. She was merely curious about the religion until she was visited by the missionaries. At first she thought they were simply guests, but she soon learned they were serious about teaching her their religion. She listened but was held back by the prejudices of her upbringing. The first time she read the Book of Mormon, she did so to find fault. The second time, her attitude changed; she began to recognize it was a powerful book unlike any she had read. Because of her rational upbringing, these feelings frightened her at first, but in the end, religion turned her world around. She discovered for herself that there was something greater in life than logic.72

On July 6, 1991, she was baptized. Her family was upset; they had been influenced by the media describing the Church as a cult and an evil influence. But they liked the missionaries. (Olia’s mother would serve meat to the missionaries while Olia would be without.) Olia interpreted for foreign visitors from the Church, translated hymns, and helped edit Bulgarian translations of the scriptures. She was later admitted to Brigham Young University.

In October 1991, Zlatan Denchev, a young man with a doctorate in chemistry, sat in a class of twenty-five students waiting for their English instructor from America. There was no mistaking their instructor—Elder Mower arrived in a checked shirt and cowboy boots, speaking so rapidly that Zlatan, though he had studied English for some time, could not understand a word. It took an hour to begin catching on and a month to understand more than half, but he persisted.73

Zlatan also attended church. His interest was such that on one occasion after a class he stayed to hear Elder Mower’s explanations about the Church even though the power was out and they

Sofia Central Branch leadership. October 25, 1992. Left to right: Zlatan Denchev, branch president (later a district president); one of his counselors; and Elder Evan Memmott, who replaced Elder Mower. Courtesy Kahlile Mehr.
sat together in darkness. Elder Mower let his students check out books, and Zlatan was the one who most availed himself of this opportunity. He checked out *Gospel Principles* and at the following class reported on the doctrine of individual agency. He asked for a Book of Mormon at the end of the English course.⁷⁴

When the missionaries visited Zlatan’s home, his family, according to Zlatan, was in a critical situation, both spiritually and temporally. However, they discovered that knowing eternal truths could change their lives. In February 1992, Zlatan Denchev and his wife, Nadia, were baptized. On March 1, 1992, the last Sunday the Mowers were in Bulgaria, Zlatan blessed the sacrament for the first time.

Nadia Dencheva discovered through the gospel that happiness comes from small things. She enjoyed the happy countenances of the missionaries and felt the joy in their hearts. Pondering the changes in her life after three years and two months of membership, Nadia decided the most important change was learning how to love others.⁷⁵

These members and others similarly altered by their new faith formed the core of Church membership in Bulgaria. Friendships in the Church were deep, and members often socialized long after the meetings concluded. Branch members felt more like a large, loving family than a group of casual acquaintances.⁷⁶ The new meaning that members found in their inner lives changed their outer world.

**Humanitarian Service**

During this time, the Church not only brought Bulgaria a new spiritual message, it also offered the country new means to help itself temporally. The first humanitarian service workers sent to Bulgaria were Lynn and Beverly Nelson. Lynn had served as director of the Sheltered Workshop, a special education school program in Logan, Utah. The Nelsons were called by the Welfare Department of the Church to serve in Bulgaria for eighteen months. They entered the country in February 1992 and began to ascertain what needs could be met by Church resources. They were given wide discretion in what they chose to do, for their call was simply to reduce the suffering of the children.⁷⁷
Just as the Nelsons entered Bulgaria, a large container of supplies including medical books arrived from Deseret Industries. The staff at the medical school in Sofia were ecstatic, and in order to make sure that the supplies reached them, the school sent their own vehicle to pick the container up at the seaport of Varna. The missionaries spread the contents of the shipment all over the floor in one of the rooms at the school. Elder Nelson distributed the supplies while Elder Mower stood at the door to make sure that nothing was removed without proper accounting.\

Elder Nelson visited the director of Special Schools in the Ministry of Education and asked what was needed for the children. The response was for assistance in psychological testing and curriculum development. The Nelsons relayed these requests to Salt Lake City, and a call went out for specialists willing to spend two or more weeks in Bulgaria and for donations of other resources needed to assist in upgrading the Bulgarian educational system. One of those answering the call was Cregg Ingram from Brigham Young University. Ingram visited special education schools in Bulgaria for four weeks and at the University of Sofia worked closely with the dean of the school for training special education teachers. He returned home and devoted six more months to developing the needed curriculum.

Meanwhile, the Nelsons determined that Bulgarian specialists needed firsthand experience in America. They selected the headmaster of a school for the deaf and an associate professor from the University of Sofia to visit Utah in early 1993. Professor Ingram hosted them at Brigham Young University. They also visited the University of Utah and Utah State. The foreign visitors were impressed by the respect given to those with disabilities and by the special education programs in the universities. The Nelsons also coordinated the shipment of equipment such as braille typewriters to two of Bulgaria’s schools for the blind.

The Nelsons suggested that the Bulgarians set up a model classroom—a wood workshop with modern tools where disabled students could develop a skill that would provide them some independence in life. The headmistress of the school selected for the model classroom believed so strongly in this program that she defied the old system and demanded funds for it from chambers of
commerce in various cities. She obtained the funds for the facility, and in May 1993, the Church gave the newly acquired facility eight thousand dollars’ worth of equipment and tools. The instructor in the new classroom was devoted to the task, having descended from a father and grandfather who both taught the disabled.

The Nelsons found time to broaden their work into other areas. They met with the head pediatrician in Bulgaria and asked again what was most needed. In response to his request for training, Fanny Tait, a neurologist, and Blair Bybee, an oncologist, both from the University of Utah Medical Center, volunteered to come to Bulgaria for two weeks. Bulgarian doctors gathered from throughout the country to be instructed, and the U.S. doctors developed a warm rapport with their colleagues. During their term of service, the Nelsons arranged for the visit of six other pediatric specialists.

Through the Nelsons, the Church helped implement a project of the International Eye Institute. The institute provided funds to purchase modern equipment, and the Church provided doctors to train Bulgarian specialists in its use. The first volunteer was Dr. Gregory Brinton, a specialist in retina surgery. He worked in Bulgaria for two weeks, both teaching and performing surgery. Seven more eye specialists came later.

The Nelsons oversaw other services, such as coordinating the delivery of textbooks to schools and libraries, microfilm equipment to archives, and clothing and blankets to orphanages. Though under the direction of Church headquarters, the Nelsons also coordinated their efforts with President Warner, who knew more about the ramifications of their efforts in Bulgaria.

Inured by years of cynicism under Communist rule, the Bulgarians were leery of accepting help without payment. Community service had always been forced in the Communist system, and they found it difficult to believe in a free offering. But through the Church’s efforts, the Bulgarians began to see the benefits of voluntary service. The pediatricians and ophthalmologists were taught not only new techniques, but also an important social ethic that they could use to help build their country. On May 18, 1993, Elder M. Russell Ballard observed the results of the Nelsons’ work. Assured that they had accomplished their task of blessing the children, he added, “It’s a wonderful thing, and surely the Lord must
be pleased that His Church is involved in this kind of humanitarian service."\textsuperscript{85}

The humanitarian service also sparked Bulgarian interest in this new religion. They asked what church would give such service and wanted to know more. They would often interrupt speakers to ask questions about the Church. It was not uncommon for a few hours of a medical lecture to be spent talking about the gospel. Many influential people who knew of the projects to aid the disabled became friends of the Church.\textsuperscript{86}

The Last of the Language Teachers

The first contract for teaching English in Smolyan was for two years (1990–92), and the Church extended it for two more. After the contract with the Saints Cyril and Methodius Foundation expired, the mission directly sponsored English classes in Sofia. The Church also provided school supplies, giving the school in Smolyan forty thousand English-language books in 1994.\textsuperscript{87} After returning home, the Fowlers stayed in touch with the school in Pravets and in 1994 were still sending supplies.\textsuperscript{88}

English was also taught in Shumen, which is in eastern Bulgaria. William and Barbara Williams from St. George, Utah, extended their mission after leaving Yugoslavia and spent six months teaching in Shumen, from January to July 1991.\textsuperscript{89}

Sister Judith Gubler left Bulgaria in December 1991. Even after returning home, Sister Gubler maintained an interest in her students. She essentially extended her mission by either financing or finding others to sponsor her Bulgarian students at colleges in California and Utah.\textsuperscript{90}

Of the original six English teachers, the Mowers were the last to leave, doing so in March 1992.\textsuperscript{91} Lynn Nelson, the humanitarian service missionary, served temporarily for thirty days as an English teacher in Sofia until the arrival of Evan and Ruth Memmott, the replacements for the Mowers.\textsuperscript{92} A sequence of sisters and another couple taught in Smolyan. While Sister Gubler and Sister Daigle were still there, two sisters were transferred to Smolyan on July 1 to teach German for the last six months of their mission: Sister Laura Karren, who had been serving in the Germany Munich Mission, and Sister Mirjam Vitense, who had been serving in the
Germany Frankfurt Mission. Sister Raylyn Hales arrived in June 1991 just before the departure of Sister Daigle. Sister Hales’s call was to proselyte, but she taught English in Smolyan for a month and a half until her proselyting companion, Sister Kira Snow, arrived. Sister Hales was replaced in Smolyan by Sister JoAnn Vasques. Arriving with Sister Vasques was a couple—Murray and Elsie Smith. The Smiths taught German in Smolyan until the end of 1992. James and Lois Schwertz taught in Smolyan after the Smiths. They came in late 1992 but worked in humanitarian services before going to Smolyan in February 1993. While in Smolyan, the Schwertzes themselves financed the trip of the school’s director to Vienna for training. Other sisters who taught in Smolyan were Sister Suzanne Vary, Sister Gwen Wheeler, and Sister Kara Gillespie.

President Warner gradually altered the English program during his presidency. Assignments for missionaries to teach English full-time were eventually phased out. Instead, President Warner assigned proselyting elders to teach faculty and staff at schools and hospitals. He always taught the first English class, made an assessment to determine at what level the class could be taught, and then assigned missionaries to continue the instruction. Of the eighty-two missionaries in Bulgaria when President Warner left in June 1994, only about fourteen were teaching English classes as part of their assignment.

Obstacles

The fall of Communism presented a new world to the Bulgarians. Interested in what had long been denied them, they began to sort through a maze of new ideas and options flooding in from the West. At first, this curiosity benefited the Church. Many Bulgarians eagerly listened to those with religious tidings from the West. The overnight transition from totalitarianism to freedom opened the door not only for the LDS Church, but for all other western churches who wished to introduce their beliefs.

In 1992, a majority of Bulgarians still knew nothing about the LDS Church; the majority of those who did know about the Church had positive opinions formed by awareness of the missionaries or the humanitarian services. By this time, however, many other
German-speaking missionaries. 1992, Smolyan, Bulgaria. *Left to right:* Sister Laura Karren, Elder Christian Elggren, and Sister Mirjam Vitense. Sisters Karren and Vitense were transferred from Germany to Bulgaria to teach German.Courtesy Christian Elggren.

Churches had also become active in Bulgaria. A few groups staged extravagant revivals and rallies and performed public faith healings. On the streets, LDS missionaries were easily recognizable as a result of their dark suits and nametags, and they were sometimes associated with the more showy evangelistic groups. About the same time, rumors about the Church began circulating, the most pernicious being that the Church taught suicide as a means to achieve heaven.97

A Swedish evangelist held a revival in Bulgaria in 1992 and was to return to Sofia in 1993. The whole city was plastered with posters, and flyers were stuffed in every mailbox. When the evangelist was refused entry for allegedly trying to spirit Bulgarian money out of the country, the media gave the incident wide attention, portraying it as a government-initiated crackdown on all religions from the West.98

The LDS Church was targeted by the press along with other religions. A flurry of negative reporting began in late 1993. Articles
appeared distorting LDS beliefs, and when a Sofia branch clerk fell to his death from an apartment window in December 1993, the press claimed that he "fanatically hoped to become a god on another planet." Although the press reported the incident as a suicide, the case was never investigated. Reports of the tragedy were nationally televised three times in a seven-day period. The media photographed and broadcast the tithing records that were in the branch clerk's room, implying clandestine financial operations.

This negative and erroneous publicity discouraged the curious from investigating the Church. As one member explained, people were frightened to listen to the missionaries because of the things they had heard in the news. Yet she felt that this fear would not stop those with a sincere interest in religion from investigating. Being a Latter-day Saint became less socially acceptable, but opposition strengthened the members' testimonies.

Missionaries at times became the objects of ridicule and the recipients of physical violence; some were hurt sufficiently to be hospitalized. But they took these problems in stride, not letting their outer circumstances alter their inner commitment. To avoid confrontations, missionaries started keeping a lower profile by occasionally not wearing nametags or suits.

Not all problems encountered by the Church in Bulgaria have been external; as Bulgarian branches have evolved from small, closely knit groups into multiple units with many new faces, the Church has encountered the same challenges that have existed in every country after the gospel has been introduced. The excitement of conversion is always difficult to match with the endurance of commitment.

The Bulgarian government has begun to retrench significantly from the "excesses of freedom" once allowed and has returned to a socialism closely resembling its Communist past. The government's attitude is that foreign churches have exploited the country; Bulgaria will continue to restrict the activity of these churches as long as this perception remains. Still, officials have not entirely classified The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this category. The Church arrived with a program of service aimed at meeting the needs of the people as defined by the Bulgarian government. English teachers and humanitarian service workers
contributed to the country's well-being at the time Bulgaria came into open contact with the Western world. Some government officials admit privately that, unlike some groups, the Latter-day Saints keep their promises.\textsuperscript{105}

**Conclusion**

The LDS Church has been in Bulgaria since 1990. It has sent not only its missionaries to reach the soul, but also its volunteers to treat the body and teach the mind. The Church’s humanitarian service has allowed the Church to meet the physical needs of a people and provide spiritual guidance to those who express an interest. Sending English teachers to a country in which the Church is not yet established has been tried elsewhere but not with such an immediate effect on Church growth as in Bulgaria. The work in Bulgaria exemplifies in action as well as in word the Church’s ultimate purpose of blessing the lives of the people.

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**NOTES**

\textsuperscript{1}For a brief history of the Church in these countries, see listings under each country in the *1995-96 Church Almanac*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1994).

\textsuperscript{2}During 1985 watershed events in the Church’s humanitarian service occurred when two churchwide fasts were held on behalf of African famine victims. The total donation toward the purchase of foodstuffs amounted to ten million dollars.


\textsuperscript{4}Prior to an offer of service to the Bulgarian government, Elder Nelson had approached other governments with offers of humanitarian assistance. In the aftermath of Armenia’s 1988 earthquake, Elder Nelson represented the Church in negotiating an agreement with the Armenian government to provide for disaster relief as directed by them. This assistance eventually took the shape of refurbishing a concrete factory to produce building slabs. The week before his visit to Armenia, Elder Nelson had been in Romania, inquiring of the Romanian government what the Church could do to help the Romanian people. He left after agreeing to provide

1Nelson, "Drama on the European Stage," 8.
3Morris Mower and Annetta Mower, interview with author, Salt Lake City, November 3, 1993, notes in possession of the author. Unless otherwise indicated, this interview is the source for material in the Pravets section.
4Delbert Fowler, telephone interview with author, December 31, 1994, notes in possession of the author.
7Judith Gubler, telephone interview with author, December 31, 1994, notes in possession of the author. This interview is also the source for the next two paragraphs.
8M. Fowler, telephone interview.
9Morris Mower, speech given at Bulgarian fireside, Salt Lake City Twentieth Ward, April 21, 1994, notes in possession of the author.
10The apartment was located on Tsar Asen I, no. 22A. They later obtained a meeting place on P. Parchevich, no. 49. Morris Mower, telephone interview with author, March 21, 1997.
16Keith Hansen, interview with author; Sofia, Bulgaria, October 22, 1992.
17M. Mower, Bulgarian fireside.
18Olia Botcheva, interview with author, Provo, Utah, August 4, 1994, notes in possession of the author.
21D. Fowler, telephone interview; M. Fowler, telephone interview. These are the sources for the rest of the section.
22Gubler, telephone interview. Unless otherwise noted, this is the source for the rest of this section.
28T. Warner, telephone interview.
29Christian Elggren, interview with author, Salt Lake City, August 4, 1994, notes in possession of the author. This is also the source for the next paragraph.
30Elggren, interview.
31T. Warner, interview.
34Elggren, interview.
35Garner, interview.
37T. Warner, interview.
38T. Warner, interview.
39Garner, interview.
40Elggren, interview.
43Garner, interview.
50Botcheva, interview.
51Elggren, interview.
53Caswell, interview.
54Kuta, “Apostles to the Slavs,” 24–27. This is also the source for rest of the section unless otherwise noted.
56Elggren, interview.
60M. Mower and A. Mower, interview, April 27, 1994.
64Dale Warner, interview with author, Ogden, Utah, December 26, 1994. This is also the source for the next two paragraphs.
65Hansen, interview.
66Hansen, interview. This is the source for the rest of the paragraph.
67Dusty Kawai and Leslie Ann Davis Kawai, interview with author, April 10, 1994, notes in possession of the author.
70Zlatan Denchev, speech given at Bulgarian fireside, Salt Lake City Twentieth Ward, April 21, 1994, notes in possession of the author; M. Mower, Bulgarian fireside.
71Mirella Lazarova, speech given at Bulgarian fireside, Salt Lake City Twentieth Ward, April 21, 1994.
72Olia Botcheva, interview with author, Provo, Utah, August 4, 1994, notes in possession of the author. This is the source for the next paragraph as well.
73Denchev, Bulgarian fireside.
74M. Mower, Bulgarian fireside. This is the source for the next paragraph as well.
75Nadia Dencheva, speech given at Bulgarian fireside, Salt Lake City Twentieth Ward, April 21, 1994.
76Botcheva, interview.
77Lynn Nelson, telephone interview with author, December 31, 1994, notes in possession of the author. Unless otherwise noted, this is the source for the rest of the section.
80D. Warner, interview.
81"Volunteers Bring Hope," 4.
82D. Warner, interview.
84Kuta, "Apostles to the Slavs," 23.
85"Volunteers Bring Hope," 4.
87D. Warner, interview.
88M. Fowler, telephone interview.
89M. Fowler, telephone interview.
90Gubler, telephone interview.
91M. Mower, Bulgarian fireside.
92Nelson, telephone interview.
93Gubler, telephone interview.
96D. Warner, interview. This is also the source for the next paragraph.
97Kawai, interview.
98D. Warner, interview; Kawai, interview.

D. Warner, interview.

Lazarova, Bulgarian fireside.

Kawai, interview.

Botcheva, interview.

Botcheva, interview.

D. Warner, interview.