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# The Mormon Missionary: Who *Is* That Knocking at My Door?

Robert L. Lively Jr.
*University of Maine at Farmington*

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## Who *Is* That Knocking at My Door?

*Robert L. Lively Jr.*

*Robert L. Lively Jr. is dean emeritus at the University of Maine at Farmington and holds a master's degree from Yale University Divinity School and a doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Oxford.* *The following are excerpts from his 2015 book* The Mormon Missionary: Who *Is* That Knocking at My Door?, *conceived after inviting missionaries to visit his religion classes and realizing that a non-Mormon had never written a book that tells the story of LDS missionaries. His research for this book involved over 275 interviews with past, present, and future missionaries, including individuals who served in every decade since the 1930s, in the United States and forty-seven countries around the world. Church officials were very supportive of his project. He was able to interview Church officials in Salt Lake City, including President Gordon B. Hinckley, as well as mission presidents, stake presidents, and local congregational leaders. He also had the rare opportunity of visiting Missionary Training Centers in Utah and England, where he conducted interviews with missionaries in training and with MTC presidents and their staff.*

### Prologue

### Missionaries in the Religion Classroom

My students were not pleased when I suggested we invite Mormon missionaries to speak to our religion class at the University of Maine at Farmington, a public liberal arts college of 2,000 students located in west-central Maine. This surprised me, because they generally enjoyed visits from representatives of faiths we were studying—from Adventists to Zen Buddhists—but for some reason they balked at the idea of Mormon missionaries.

Most in the class of thirty acknowledged that people had knocked on their door, wanting to talk about religion (although they frequently confused Mormons with Jehovah's Witnesses), but few had invited them in. They found them a mild irritant. One student said he didn't like people trying to force their religion down his throat; an older woman admitted she had chased them off her porch "a time or two"; while a third said she went into the basement and did her laundry when she saw two well-dressed young men coming down the road.

The students chuckled; but then some became self-reflective. One student said she always turned them away but felt bad doing so because they seemed so nice, while an older student admitted their appearance made him realize he wasn't as patient as he thought he was, for he would close the door before they could finish saying hello. "So," said a young man sitting in the front row and wearing a Boston Red Sox baseball cap, "if we don't invite them into our homes, why should we invite them into our classroom? Do we *have* to invite them?"

Exercising my professorial prerogative, I said, "Yes!"

I extended an invitation to two young women and two young men who were serving their missions in our area, which is a rural region characterized by small towns, pristine lakes, and forests of pine, birch, and maple. I asked them to say something about themselves, to talk about the history and beliefs of their church, and to describe what it is like to be a missionary.

The presentation was followed by animated discussion. Students were respectful, but direct. Their interest had become obvious. Evangelical Protestants questioned the need for a new prophet and a new scripture, saying Jesus and the Bible are all that are needed for salvation. Many students questioned why they needed to live such austere lives, and they wondered how missionaries dealt with rejection and with people being rude to them. The missionaries, as they are taught, didn't argue; they merely shared their beliefs and experiences.

My students continued the conversation during the next class period, speaking more bluntly without the missionaries present. Evangelicals felt Latter-day Saints should not be considered Christians, in spite of the fact that "Jesus Christ" appears in the name. The term "cult" was used more than once. Those with an academic interest in religion found the idea of progressive revelation, which suggests that the potential exists for new prophets and new scriptures, to be an interesting concept. They just weren't sure Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon had a part in the process.

But it was the missionaries' rigorous and disciplined lifestyle that intrigued students the most, and while many said they neither would,

nor could, do what Mormon missionaries do, they did appreciate what the Latter-day Saint Church and the missionaries gained from it: the Church gained converts and a more committed membership, and missionaries came away with a stronger faith and with knowledge and skills that would serve them for a lifetime.

At the end of the class period, when I asked if I should invite Mormon missionaries back in subsequent semesters, students responded with an enthusiastic, "Yes!"

## Chapter 6
## Find

### "Without Purse or Scrip"

One of the most unique interviews for this study was with a missionary who served in New England in the late 1940s. He must have been one of the last in this country to travel "without purse or scrip": the practice of proselytizing with little money, food, or clothes in hand, depending on the goodwill of people to house and feed the missionary. It is an approach to missions that missionaries from many different faiths have practiced over the centuries, including Latter-day Saint missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The practice is inconceivable among Mormon missionaries today, and it was a special set of circumstances that led the interviewee to engage in it in eastern Massachusetts and in the Connecticut River Valley in the late 1940s.

Latter-day Saint missionaries weren't having much success in the larger cities in New England following WWII, because Yankee Calvinists had been replaced by Irish, Polish, and Italian immigrants, most of whom were devoutly Roman Catholic. They had been told by their priests not to talk with representatives of other faiths, because it was said to be harmful to their spiritual well-being. The interviewee said that when they knocked on the door and the person realized they weren't from the local parish, older women would appear frightened, while the men (as he recalled in one instance) would tell them they had ten seconds to get off of the porch, or they would be thrown off.

The mission president, realizing they weren't going to get anywhere in the cities and that the shrinking Yankee population was still out in the countryside, decided missionaries should concentrate on small towns instead of big cities. He sent them out two-by-two with the barest of necessities—a change of underwear and some literature—and that was about it.

The mission president referred to it as "country work." As soon as the snow melted, missionaries gave up the place where they stayed

in the winter, and they started walking. The interviewee stressed that they walked (they didn't have bicycles), and he did it for thirteen of his twenty-four-month mission. They slept outside maybe five times during the entire time. Every other night they found people to take them in, or they were in jail. They didn't have to twist arms; all they had to do was tell people their situation and they experienced considerable hospitability.

They walked from one town to another, and they corresponded through the mail every week with the mission president. They told him what town they expected to be in the next week, and he would forward their mail from home to them, care of general delivery at the post office in the next small town, a distance of perhaps twenty to thirty miles.

It was an experience "that separated the men from the boys," he said, and while some elders broke down during the process, very few went home early. Most who engaged in the practice were WWII veterans who had seen worse (which may help account for the fact that the mission president allowed it). The interviewee wasn't a veteran, but a nineteen-year-old from California who found it to be a scary experience; but he finally took to it, because it was a challenge to do something that was really "flaky," and he was just enough of a kid that the idea of doing something unconventional like that appealed to him.

"Not my better instincts," he added, "but it had its appeal." In the summer of 1947, he and his companion walked up the Connecticut River on the New Hampshire side, and down the river on the Vermont side, stopping at all the towns along the way. They would go into a town, typically containing a few hundred people, and they lined up a meeting hall to which they invited people that night. It could be a grange hall, or a church if the minister wasn't anti-Mormon, or a school if they found someone on the school board who was friendly. On occasion they were turned away pretty abruptly from all of these possibilities and would have to depend on some friendly soul whose door they knocked on and who had a living room large enough to invite.

Almost without exception (and there were exceptions, to be sure), they succeeded early in finding some kind of meeting hall, and then they would canvas the whole town, knocking on every door, telling people who they were and why they were there, and inviting them to a meeting that evening.

He and his companion played the piano at the meeting, sang, prayed, and gave a sermon. They left behind pamphlets and copies of the Book of Mormon. They asked for fifty-cent donations for the books, which people usually paid.

They were thrown on their own resources and had to improvise in order to find teaching opportunities. He and his companion were in a drugstore in a small town in New Hampshire in July 1947 when they overheard a man from the Rotary Club bemoaning the fact that the guest speaker for the day's meeting was unable to attend at the last minute and that the Rotarians would be expecting a speaker, but that he as the program chairperson didn't have anyone else he could turn to. The interviewee said he noticed on the newsstand a picture of Brigham Young on the cover of a magazine, commemorating the centennial anniversary of the arrival of Young and the Mormon Pioneers to the Great Salt Lake Valley. He walked over to the man, introduced himself and his companion, pointed to the magazine and said, "Would you like to know about this? We will come and talk to you for free."

The man gave them lunch, and they spoke to the Rotarians for around thirty minutes. This opened up speaking opportunities at other Rotary Clubs.

The elders weren't always so well-received. There were nights when they had to sleep in jail. Sheriffs would pick them up under vagrancy laws, which required strangers in town to be able to cover a night's lodging, and, if they couldn't, they were operationally defined as a vagrant and would be locked up for the night. Thus they had to compromise and carry enough money to cover a night's lodging, but they hoped they wouldn't have to use it. In a lot of towns, it was five dollars each for lodging, so that is how much they each carried.

The experience created a special bond between the missionaries involved. They met periodically for local, district-wide, or mission-wide missionary conferences. As he described it: "We, of course, had war stories to tell, which was a great part of the fun, but of course these war stories took on a life of their own, and, like all war stories, they got well-embroidered with each new telling, each trying to top the other."

Their relationship remained strong for many years thereafter, renewed by annual missionary reunions in Salt Lake City.

## Chapter 9
## International Missions

### Americans at the Door, and Speaking the Native's Language

Some are impressed by the fact that American LDS missionaries meet them in their homes, and they are doubly impressed by the fact that LDS missionaries (of any nationality) speak the language of the country.

An American elder who served in Brazil said they were told it was an honor for Brazilians to have Americans in their home. An American elder who served in an Afrikaans area of South Africa worked with an Afrikaans companion and became proficient with the language, because they agreed to speak Afrikaans all the time. They taught and baptized an Afrikaans mother and daughter, and the interviewee said it was a highlight of his missionary experience. He was able to teach them in their native tongue, and they were thrilled that an American, "with an American twang in Afrikaans," would teach them and have the respect to learn their language.

An American elder who served in smaller, rural towns in Mexico said he and his companion would tract out the whole town, and in some places people were quite willing to talk with them. They may not have been interested in religion, but they were willing to invite them in and talk with them. In one town they were the first Mormon missionaries to visit there, and they were something of a curiosity. The local Roman Catholic priests viewed them as a tremendous threat, but they got into almost everyone's home. People were curious and charmed, for here were two young gringo missionaries at their door. People weren't always sure who the young men were, even when they were told, but they were impressed with these two young, clean-cut men who were speaking pretty good Spanish.

The interviewee surmised the combination of native hospitality for a foreigner, plus a charming foreigner, was the basis for letting them into their homes. A lot of them almost seemed flattered that young foreigners were talking with them; they often got the sense they were flattering the Mexicans by coming into their homes and giving them attention. If the missionaries continued to be charming, knew the language, were comfortable with the customs, and were interested in coming back, sometimes out of that would develop a more serious commitment on the Mexican's part, and they would want to participate in the discussions.

**Times and Seasons: The Effects of Historical Events**

Missionaries serving in the latter half of the twentieth century saw the effects of dramatic world events on people's lives, and they saw how these events affected their success (or lack thereof) at proselytizing.

A sister who served in France in the mid-1960s said the work was pretty slow in Europe at that time. She taught two or three investigators, who were then baptized by elders, in a year's time. Many people she encountered "had a pretty grim view of life." They had been through

some very hard times: World War II and the Algerian War, a decolonization war which took place between 1954 and 1962 in which Algeria gained its independence from France. Both wars were quite a part of many people's lives. At many of the doors on which she and her companion knocked people would say that anyone who believes in God is foolish, for He wouldn't allow all of the suffering to go on that they saw in the world. They didn't even want to hear about God.

A woman who lived in Italy as a teenager during World War II, and who lived through American air raids, confronted American missionaries when they appeared at her door in Brazil many years later. She asked how Americans could drop bombs on her head but then want to talk with her about the gospel. She had particular reservations about Joseph Smith, questioning how he could be a modern-day prophet, especially since he was an American. She eventually had a change of heart and joined the Church.

An American elder who served in Germany in the late 1990s said they tracted into a man in his eighties in Schwarzenberg, and they taught him the first discussion. At the end he told the elders he respected them for coming so far from their homes, but there was something they had to understand. First, he said, the country had Hitler, who promised that everything would be better if they followed Nazism—but it wasn't. Then the Communists came and said if they followed communism, life would be good—but it wasn't. Then the Berlin wall came down, and capitalism came in, and everyone promised life would be better—but it wasn't.

"So now," continued the elderly man, "you two young men from America come and tell me that if I join this religion, everything will be better. You will have to forgive me, but I don't believe you."

The elder said it put things into perspective, and he could see the man's point.

**Who Are the Converts, and Why?**

A General Authority told me that the majority of international converts to the Latter-day Saint Church today are either Roman Catholics or the unchurched. Roman Catholics are coming especially from Latin America, and part of that success may be the Book of Mormon itself, since it claims to be the history of the peoples who inhabited the area, thus giving divine importance to their ancestral heritage.

An American anthropologist colleague encountered Mormon missionaries while working in Peru in the 2000s, and she commented that evangelical movements and Latter-day Saints were making definite

headway in the south-central Peruvian Andes. She observed that the nicest building in the entire town of Andahuaylas was the Mormon church, but what was unusual about it was that, unlike other churches in town, the Mormon church had a large iron fence around the compound, giving the impression that it was completely off limits to nonmembers. (I observed the same thing in Mongolia.) She didn't personally encounter Mormon missionaries in Andahuaylas, but she was told that groups of Latter-day Saints from the United States periodically came to build houses in the Andahuaylas area. People were always amazed at how fast a group of Americans could build a house, as compared to how long it typically took locals to build one.

While she wasn't researching the Latter-day Saint Church in Peru, Peruvians told the anthropologist that the primary reason why people were switching from Catholicism to the Mormon faith was the prohibition on drinking alcohol. The conversion process was typically led by women in an attempt to get their husbands to stop drinking, because heavy consumption of alcohol was strongly associated with domestic violence.

A Venezuelan convert who served his mission in his home country said his mother prayed for help because his father was a heavy drinker; the Latter-day Saint missionaries appeared at their door not long thereafter—the only door in the apartment building they knocked on. The family converted.

A Russian Orthodox priest I spoke to in Petrozavodsk, Russia, while no fan of Western missionaries pouring into his country and luring his flock away, did concede that Latter-day Saints were having some success in helping Russians who had drinking problems.

When I asked a returned missionary and current college professor why the Latter-day Saint Church is so successful in Latin America, he said the Church offers something very different for families: it offers "a real lifestyle change" that is very attractive to people. Spiritual principles are taught, help is available—whether in combating alcoholism or an addiction to tobacco—and practical assistance is offered, whether it is improved health care or building a new home. "These things change lives," he observed, "and it does something for them spiritually and physically. It makes quite a difference in their lives, they are excited by it, they share that with their friends, and pretty soon their friends want to know about it, and their friends end up joining the Church."

He went on to say that in Brazil (in contrast to countries like the United States and Western Europe, where the Church has had a presence

since the nineteenth century), the Latter-day Saint Church hasn't been there that long and Brazilians are still meeting Mormon missionaries for the first time. "They have not seen them at the door ten times before," he observed. "I suppose that is part of it, too."

## Chapter 10
## Sister Missionaries

There is a story that circulates at the Provo MTC:

> Three elders found a magic lamp at the Provo MTC, and when they rubbed it a genie appeared.
>
> "Since there are three of you," said the genie, "I will grant you each one wish."
>
> "I want to perform two hundred baptisms during my mission," said the first elder.
>
> "Consider it done," said the genie.
>
> "I would like to be a mission president some day," said the second elder.
>
> "It will be granted," said the genie.
>
> "I would like to be the *best* missionary in the history of the Church!" exclaimed the third elder.
>
> "It too shall be," said the genie—and the young elder was immediately turned into a sister missionary.

There has been a decided shift in the Latter-day Saint Church over the past three or four decades regarding how Church members perceive young LDS women serving missions. What used to be seen as an unusual activity, or one even worthy of pity, has been replaced by attitudes of acceptance and even of encouragement.

Young Latter-day Saint women aren't expected to serve—that is the responsibility of the young elders—rather, their role in the Church is that of spouse, mother, and homemaker. When a young woman did go on a mission in earlier decades of the twentieth century, some Church members would wonder: "Why is she serving a mission? Can't she find a husband? Is a mission her last resort?"

This questioning has given way in more recent decades to a more positive attitude about sisters serving, which is shaped by forces both within and without the Latter-day Saint Church. Interviewees spoke of watching brothers, relatives, and friends return from their missions and of being struck by what a positive experience it had been for them: they were more mature, had better communication skills, and exhibited a deeper spirituality. The sisters wanted the same for themselves.

Attitudes by and about women were also changing in the wider American society; postponing marriage, personal independence, and considering options outside of marriage and motherhood were accepted and even encouraged.

As a result, many young Latter-day Saint women now actively seek to serve their Church through missions. They want to help spread the Latter-day Saint gospel, and they want to share in the benefits that come from the experience.

Some young sisters report they don't want to marry early—they want to consider other options first, be it further education, employment, or a mission. But with options come choices, and some sisters report that having more choices makes their decision to serve that much more difficult. It comes down to following the counsel of Church leaders, or not.

"Do I date and marry, or do I postpone marriage until *after* my mission?" asked a sister.

Earlier generations of sisters said they didn't have to face this dilemma. Serving a mission "wasn't even on their radar screen," as one older woman described it. Since it was not expected of them, they didn't even think about it. Many of today's younger sisters *do* think about it, but since they don't have a mandate to serve, since it isn't a clear-cut decision as it is for young men, some sisters decide to serve only at the last minute. And when they do serve, some carry lingering doubts about whether they should have stayed home and married.

**A Bimodal Distribution?**

One of the more awkward topics that surfaced during research for this book had to do with what a returned sister missionary and current college professor labeled as the perceived "bimodal distribution" of the effectiveness of sisters. Put more bluntly, there is the perception among some that sisters make the best missionaries—and that they also make the worst missionaries; that committed and motivated sisters can do wonders, while sisters who came out for the wrong reasons may not contribute much to the mission. On the one end of the spectrum are the very committed, true believers who are very bright, very smart, and who come into the mission with the attitude, "I'm taking control," whereas at the other end are those sisters who say, "I am not married, what shall I do? If I go on a mission, maybe I will meet someone."

A sister who served in Japan in the early 1970s described this bimodal perception. She said sisters were either perceived as an "anchor," as more

mature, and as contributing to more baptisms, or they were perceived as being emotionally and physically weak and a "bother."

There were female and male interviewees who said they felt there was some truth to the stereotype, but there were also those, sisters and elders, who said it wasn't a true representation, that there are effective and not-so-effective elders, just as there are effective and not-so-effective sisters. Some suggested that the sisters' smaller numbers contributed to the bimodal perception, that since they are fewer in number they are more noticeable. Others said that the sisters' greater propensity to talk about their feelings and concerns, as compared to the more reticent elders, contributed to the perception that sisters complain more and are less stable emotionally.

Enough spoke of it that I felt it necessary to include it in this book.

Sisters serve for many reasons. They believe that it is God's will for them, they want to serve others both spiritually and temporally, and they want the blessings and benefits that come from a mission. Granted, some said they lacked direction prior to their mission, others talked of plans that had not come to pass, while for some it was a last-minute decision. But regardless of their initial reasons for serving, it was seen as an important step prior to marriage and parenthood.

A sister who served in Northern New England in the mid-1990s echoed the feelings of many sisters interviewed for this book when she said: "Before becoming somebody's wife or mother, I want to become somebody. I want to know who I am first. Serving a mission will help me do that."

## Chapter 11
## Senior Missionaries and Other Types of Missionary Service

The youthful sisters and elders aren't the only Latter-day Saints who volunteer for missionary service. Many retired Church members, like their retired counterparts in wider society, seek new challenges and experiences, and thousands serve in a variety of missionary roles around the world. They include senior couples and senior sisters, and they are in great demand because they typically are faithful, long-standing members who bring a wealth of knowledge and skills to the mission field.

Some engage in proselytizing missions characteristic of younger missionaries, but the majority prefer other types of activities that fall under a broader definition of "mission," activities that draw on their

training, experience, and special abilities. These can include leadership support for members at the local level, genealogical research, temple work, medical assignments, social and educational services, and serving at visitors' centers and historic sites and in mission offices. While the seniors' numbers pale in comparison to the younger missionaries' (there were around seven thousand serving in 2015), their maturity, commitment, and life experiences make them among the most effective of all missionaries.

Seniors are to conform to the dress and grooming standards that apply to younger missionaries, and, to the extent possible, given their primary assignment, they are to find, friendship, and teach the Latter-day Saint gospel. They do enjoy greater flexibility than younger missionaries: they have some say in what they do, where they serve, and for how long. Their day-to-day schedules are not so rigid. They may take the occasional nap when they feel tired.

They do face special challenges, which limit the numbers who serve. Some have lingering health problems; they worry about what to do with their homes and gardens while they are away; and they miss their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They have also faced financial constraints, because most (until September 2011) paid all of their mission expenses, which could be significant. The recession in the latter part of the 2000s had a negative effect on recruiting seniors, and Church leaders, in an attempt to make senior missionary service more appealing and doable, relaxed some of their expectations regarding how long seniors can or must serve, how flexible their schedules can be, and how much they are expected to pay.

Like younger missionaries, seniors say the positives outweigh the negatives. They are pleased they can be of service to others and to the Church, they serve as parents or grandparents to the younger missionaries, and they enjoy both spiritual and personal growth. It can also be a time of self-discovery. They see that even in their advancing years they can learn new things, do new things, and change in ways they hadn't thought possible.

There are other categories of service that don't fit the traditional picture of a missionary. There are Church-Service Missionaries: people who may work from home or who serve in various capacities at Church sites close to home. Members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir are considered missionaries, and they are formally set apart for that role. They too are dedicated to supporting the Church and furthering its message, or, as is said, "helping move the work along."

**Senior Missionary Training Center, Provo, Utah**

Training for senior missionaries, like training for younger missionaries, has evolved over time. Advances in transportation, communication, and the use of electronic media have made training more efficient, and stays at the Senior Missionary Training Center in Provo have been shortened as a result.

Some things don't change, however: the reasons for going, and the reservations about going, have remained pretty constant over time.

I had the pleasure and unusual opportunity of spending a day at the Senior Missionary Training Center in Provo in April 1994 with the Director of Administrative Services of the MTC. The Senior MTC at that time was located in a renovated motel that had been donated to Brigham Young University. It accommodated up to 150 older missionaries. It was separate from the larger MTC in Provo, and since seniors had more freedom than younger missionaries (the seniors could have cars and come and go as necessary), MTC administrators were just as happy to keep the two groups apart.

I was given a tour of the complex. During our tour I noticed there were older couples and single, senior sisters (a senior sister is defined as forty years of age or older), but there were no older, single men preparing for a senior mission. A General Authority told me they typically don't go on a senior mission; older, single men are needed for other Church callings, especially leadership positions in local churches. He said there also have been problems in the past because women sometimes perceived single men in the mission field as being eligible bachelors, and they pursued them. There had also been issues with older men serving as companions; they didn't always get along too well, living in such close quarters with one another. Single, senior sisters would confirm they faced similar companion issues.

I sat in on classes, interviewed seniors, and ate lunch with recently arrived couples. They had classes in the morning and afternoon, and in the evening they had classes or a devotional with a General Authority. They used the same study materials as the younger missionaries, and young returned missionaries studying at BYU taught them. In 1994, those going on an English-speaking mission stayed less than two weeks, while those learning a language stayed two months.

I interviewed a group of fifteen seniors. As we sat in a circle, I told them they reminded me of Elderhostelers (Elderhostel is an educational program for seniors) and of older continuing-education students with whom I had worked. They were enthusiastic, bright-eyed, and at a point

of transition in their lives when they wanted to do something new and different. They smiled and nodded in agreement. I asked why they were choosing to serve a mission, and their responses included: as a way to show thanks to the Lord for what He had done for them; to serve others; and to help build the Latter-day Saint Church. They also expected to gain spiritual and personal benefits. Some said they felt it would contribute to their salvation, some had just retired and wanted something new and challenging to do, and some, for whom this was their third or fourth mission, said missionary work "was in their blood" and they were going to continue to serve until they could do so no longer. They also felt the mental stimulation was good for them, that it helped stave off dementia.

One sister offered a very personal reason. She said her husband had just died not too long ago, and going on a mission was the right thing to do at that point in her life. Otherwise, she said, she would sit at home and feel sorry for herself. I got a sense of the camaraderie and mutual support of the group when the sister seated next to her reached over and patted her hand.

A couple going to England had other reasons for serving. He was in college during the Korean War, and the Latter-day Saint Church had reached an agreement with the U.S. government that fewer missionaries would serve during that time. Thus he didn't go. (Restrictions on the number of young men who can serve missions during wartime are common.) He said he had always hoped and dreamed of going, and he was glad he could do it now. His wife added that she had always wanted to serve a mission, but young women weren't encouraged to do so as she was growing up in the 1930s and 1940s. She was now fulfilling her dream.

Another reason surfaced, which I hadn't expected, and which was echoed around the room. A member of the family (typically a son or daughter) had drifted away from the Church, and the parents hoped their example of dedication and sacrifice would impress their offspring, such that he or she would become active again in the Church. One couple told of a son who had served a good mission and who was very bright, but who began to question the doctrines of the Church not long after returning home from his mission. He stopped attending, and he remained inactive to that day. They hoped their service would motivate him to start attending again.

"Words haven't worked," added a couple from South America, who were going to Italy and whose children had left the Church. "Perhaps our example will get them back into the fold."

A sister who had been quiet during the session said she faced other issues with her children; they hadn't supported her joining the Latter-day Saint Church or going on a mission. She had raised her large family as a single mother and as a strong member of another religious faith, but when she converted to the Latter-day Saint Church in her early fifties, at least one of her children was "devastated" by her decision and wouldn't speak to her. She was made to feel guilty about going on a mission, because she would miss the wedding of one of her children and the birth of a grandchild. The sister said she was going anyway, because she had been looking forward to it for thirteen years, and if she didn't go then, she probably never would.

Another senior said her children thought that when she turned sixty she should just curl up on the sofa and watch TV. "I might do it at ninety," she quipped, "but for now, I'm going on a mission!"

## Chapter 13
## Transitions, Leaving the Church, and the Future of Missionary Work

### A Homecoming Story

A sister from the Northwest, who returned home from her mission in Northern New England, shared her homecoming story. She recalled that as her plane taxied to the gate, the airport windows were filled with signs saying, "Welcome Home, Kate!" There were so many signs that the pilot came on the intercom and said, "It looks like we have a passenger named Kate with us today."

Still wearing her missionary nametag, Kate was quickly identified by her fellow passengers, who encouraged her to be first off the plane.

As she exited, Kate recalled that as she was leaving for her mission eighteen months earlier from this very same airport, she had confided to her mother, "I hope I can do this."

As she entered the terminal and was greeted by her parents, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, and friends, her mother rushed to her—and as they embraced, Kate said through her tears: "I did do it, I did do it, and to the best of my ability. It was hard, very hard, but I was a good missionary."

To which her mother responded, "I knew you would be, Kate. I knew you would be. Welcome home."