

Australia Local Pages

How Do I Know When I Am Forgiven?

By Elder Tad R. Callister, Pacific Area President

About three years ago I finished my service as the President of the Canada Toronto East Mission. Since then I have conducted a mission tour of almost every mission in the Pacific Area. A common question asked by missionaries is, “How do I know when I am forgiven of my sins?”

No doubt we have all asked that question at one time or another. I have usually responded by saying, “If you feel the Spirit in your life—when you pray or read the scriptures, or teach, or testify, or at any other time, then that is your witness that you have been cleansed, or that the cleansing process is taking place—for the Spirit cannot dwell in an unholy tabernacle. In most cases the cleansing process takes time because our change in nature takes time, but in the interim we can proceed with the confidence that God approves of our progress as manifested by the presence of His Spirit.

At times I think some people are harder on themselves than the Lord is. Of course we must repent to be eligible for the cleansing and forgiving powers of the Atonement, but once we have repented there is no such thing as a spotted or cream-colored repentor in God’s kingdom. There is no black mark on our right ankle that says “2008 sin” or brown stain behind our left ear that says “2010 trespass”. The Lord declared the comprehensive cleansing power of His Atonement when He said, “Though your sins be as scarlet,

they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). That is the miracle of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

On some occasions I believe our sins are cleansed before the guilt goes away. In other words, the guilt may linger beyond the cleansing. Why is that? Perhaps in God’s mercy the memory of that guilt is a warning, a spiritual “stop sign” of sorts that cries out when similar temptations confront us, “Don’t go down that road—you know the pain it can bring.” Accordingly, it is meant to be a protection, not a punishment.

Will our guilt ever go away? The promise of the Lord is an unequivocal yes. To the righteous the Lord said that the time would come when “their joy shall be full forever” (2 Nephi 9:18), meaning there will come a time when there will be no past twinges or memories of guilt. God has confirmed that at some future date He will “wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more . . . sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

How can we accelerate the time when we can be like Enos, whose “guilt was swept away” (Enos 1:6) or the converted Lamanites, who witnessed that the Lord had “taken away the guilt of our hearts” (Alma 24:10), or Alma, who could recall his sins, but who nonetheless exclaimed, “I could remember my pains no more” (Alma 36:19)?

There seems to be two conditions that will free us from all guilt and pain. First is our faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning powers. When Enos asked how his guilt was removed the Lord responded, “Because of thy faith in Christ” (Enos 1:8). Accordingly, the more we learn about the



Elder Tad R.
Callister

Atonement, the greater our ability to forgive ourselves and others. Second is the development of a character that has “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). Then we view ourselves no longer in our “carnal state” (Mosiah 4:2), but as true sons and daughters of God. Scrooge, the famous character in Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, had so transformed his life that he could rightfully declare, “I am not the man I was.” As we repent we become a different person than we were, and that realization of our new identity, coupled with our faith in Christ’s infinite Atonement, allows us to reach the point where we can say as Alma said, “I could remember my pains no more, yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more” (Alma 36:19).

In the meantime, until that final drop of guilt is removed, we can proceed with confidence that because we feel the Lord’s Spirit we have been cleansed, or at least that the cleansing process is working its divine miracle as we make our transformation from the carnal man to the spiritual man. Then eventually we too can truthfully say, “I am not the man I was.” And then our guilt will be swept away and our joy will be full. ■

Tasmanian Records on FamilySearch

An important family history digitising project is being undertaken by local retired Church members Len and Cecily Watson, who are donating 15 hours per week at the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office (TAHO).

About 168,000 original records will soon be available online under a new partnership between the TAHO and FamilySearch. The volunteer project, which will continue for around 12 months, includes registers of volunteers enrolled in the Southern Tasmanian Volunteer Artillery (1879–1899); details of permanent officers of the public service (1905–1947); lower court records (1847–1900); gaol records (1890–1932); naturalisation records (1835–1905) and land engine operation certificates (1890–1919).

“TAHO records are available as a global resource and can help Tasmanians to learn more about their family history,” Brother Watson said. “This great new resource will make it quicker and easier for Tasmanians and other people interested in family history to find records and other important

documents. To have these fantastic resources available online is of great importance to researchers interested in family history.”

The first examples of their work can be found online by going to **www.archives.tas.gov.au** and clicking on **Tasmanian Archives Online**. The Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office combine the collections and services of the Archives Office of Tasmania, the Launceston Local Studies Collection and the State Library’s Heritage Collections. ■

Len and Cecily Watson work to digitise Tasmanian family history records.



Australian Sisters Protected in Christchurch Earthquake

Sister Geraldine Fafai from Brisbane, and her companion, Sister Taake Moantau from Tarawa Kiribati, feel they were miraculously spared during the devastating 22 February Christchurch earthquake in New Zealand.

The sisters were supposed to meet a lady at 1:00 p.m. outside the Christchurch Cathedral. They had planned to have a discussion together, but around noon the lady called the sisters and cancelled the appointment as she had been called in to work. Their appointed meeting place—the cathedral—was one of the buildings in downtown Christchurch most severely damaged during the quake when the steeple and many bricks fell to the ground during the seismic event.

Sister Fafai believes it was a miracle that she, her companion and their friend were not near the cathedral just before 1:00 p.m. when the earthquake struck. And she also credits a second miracle for saving their life that same day.

As they climbed aboard a bus to leave the appointment, the driver said: “No, this is the wrong bus for you,” so they got



IMAGE COURTESY OF LDS STAFF

off and boarded a second bus. Then the quake began, and in horror the sisters watched as a building fell onto the first bus—the one they were on just moments before.

Sister Fafai recalls how they then walked along the road, the buildings still shaking, with panicked people all around them with looks of shock and fear on their faces. “But we were both calm,” she said.

Sister Evelyn Tapa, also from Brisbane and serving in Christchurch, said, “I had never experienced an earthquake before, so I just stood there

Sister Fafai recounts on a YouTube segment her protection during the Christchurch earthquake.

while everyone else was on the ground.”

These Australian sisters and others shared their earthquake experiences via the Pacific Public Affairs’ Channel YouTube video entitled “Sisters”.

Missionaries from the Church have been involved in cleanup and other community service in Christchurch since 22 February. Sister Fafai says that she and other missionaries are continuing to pray for those who lost loved ones and were impacted in other ways due to the 6.3 magnitude earthquake, “that they may have comfort and peace.” ■

Gospel Helps Youth Succeed at High School

By John Millar

Holly Smibert, Riley King and Cameron Munro were all smiles as applause and cheering rang out during the Robina High School 2010 end-of-year awards night at the Gold Coast Arts Centre. These students, youth from the Gold Coast Australia Stake, were awarded top honours.

Holly Smibert received the junior school dux award, Riley the senior school dux, and Cameron was named a school captain for the 2011 school year. The three also won several other awards and prizes for their outstanding academic achievements. To attain their academic goals, the youth said, they understand the importance not only of spending time on their studies, but of “living the gospel of Jesus Christ, attending early morning seminary, and making time for the Lord.”

“If I put the Sabbath day aside for the Lord,” said Holly, as well as time each morning in seminary, reading my scriptures and so on, then I know He’ll have time for me, and bless me, and He definitely has.”

“One of the goals for the young men in the Aaronic Priesthood is to gain as much education as possible,” said Riley King. “I’ve tried to take the counsel of the Brethren of the Church, and living the gospel is the driving force behind being able to achieve my goals. Seminary has helped me understand and rely on the Lord’s help and also to further develop good study habits.”

Cameron Munro particularly felt the help of the Holy Ghost while running for school captain. Cameron’s parents and teachers encouraged him to run for the position, and with their encouragement he decided to do something unusual. He sang



Riley King, Holly Smibert and Cameron Munro received awards at Robina High School.

his campaign speech—much to the delight of the other students, who cheered and clapped along.

“I was freaking out about it,” he said. “I wouldn’t have had the confidence to do that without the Lord’s help. I’m sure the Spirit helped [me] and put my name in people’s minds when they were voting.”

Gold Coast stake president Dean Reid emphasised what a strength the youth are to the Church’s congregations and commented on how pleasing it was to know that the youth were internalising principles of education, hard work, and living the gospel diligently.

“It gives motivation to leaders,” said President Reid, “because rearing our rising generation of youth is the purpose for much of our teaching and activities in the Church.”

Riley King said, “My friends also have respect for my standards—they don’t swear around me or offer me alcohol, and they pull me up on things, even though they don’t share the standards. Opportunities to share the gospel have also come. My friends know my standards and respect me for them. And I’ve been able to invite friends to Church activities.”

Holly Smibert has been able to share the doctrines of the gospel and the Book of Mormon. “My friends have asked questions about my religion,

which have at times led to gospel discussions”, she said. “It takes courage to share the gospel or offer someone a Book of Mormon, but I’ve felt the help of the Holy Ghost.”

Holly Smibert, Riley King and Cameron Munro are now prioritising their efforts for the future with goals of university study and mission

preparation at the top of the list for Riley; doing well in school and seminary for Holly; and academic goals, saving for a mission and being a great school captain for Cameron.

“I hope to help with unity among the students and year levels,” Cameron adds, “and work well to make good plans with the school committees.” ■

First Female Missionary from Solomon Islands Serves with Faith

Veronica Irobeni is a bright star when it comes to facing fear. She is the first woman from the Solomon Islands to serve a mission for the Church, and she has overcome many intimidating barriers along the way while completing her mission in New Zealand.

Sister Irobeni said she was converted to the Church when her auntie asked her to “observe the members of the Church” in her home city of Honiara, Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands. She said she did observe the Mormons for a while, and she noticed that there was a kind and gentle feeling among the members. She added that she was drawn to the way that all of the members treated each other as equals regardless of education or station in life.

Sister Irobeni said that when her uncle baptised her a member of the Church, she set a goal to go on a mission. Her call

eventually came to serve in the Auckland New Zealand Mission. She arrived at the Missionary Training Centre in Hamilton, New Zealand, speaking little English. She was the only woman missionary at the training centre at the time, which she said did not make matters easier for her. She was described as “shy and sweet” when she arrived.

While she still beams a world-class smile and is the epitome of sweetness, she has since overcome her shyness and is described by her last missionary companion as “Bold! Bolder than I am.”

Sister Irobeni has spoken at dozens of Church services and one-on-one to thousands of strangers, some of whom are now members of the Church because she had the courage to greet them with a winning smile, a warm handshake, and the Church’s story.

Sister Irobeni did not know



Sister Veronica Irobeni with her mission president and his wife, President and Sister Porter.

how to ride a bicycle, but she committed to learn and arranged lessons from some of her missionary companions. It did not help that her bike was stolen on the very eve of her first lesson. She described how she gathered her courage, and with great practice, ended up joyfully riding her bike.

The next challenge? Sister Irobeni says she is working toward becoming a student at Brigham Young University—Hawaii. Her fear is that her English and schooling are not adequate to allow her to compete at a university level. Time will tell, but vanquishing fear and overcoming barriers are Sister Irobeni’s strong suits. ■

Mormon Basketball on Thursday Island: Breaking Down Sporting and Racial Barriers

By Christopher Cooper

In 1961 Thursday Island made its mark in sporting history. Coached by two Mormon missionaries, two basketball teams—a men’s team and a women’s team—from Thursday Island competed in an Australian basketball tournament in Cairns—a first in Thursday Island history.

Between 1938 and 1961, Mormon missionaries in Australia overcame negative perceptions about the Church by playing basketball. The elders’ great example of leadership and sportsmanship, both on and off the court, helped open the hearts of the Australian people to the Mormons and their message, as it did on Thursday Island back in 1961.

Gary Blacker, one of the missionaries and the basketball coach on Thursday Island back in 1961, now living in Utah, USA, recently related, “We introduced basketball to them, and those kids just wanted us to teach them. It was really neat!”

Hassan Bin Tahl of Thursday Island, a young basketball player of that era, said, “We weren’t allowed to mix with white people much, but when Gary came, he broke that administration norm by teaching us. No one had ever coached us, because whites couldn’t play with us. We couldn’t play any sports with them.”

May Dewis, another young basketball player from the time, said, “When you saw those elders walking, there would just be a trail of kids following them to the basketball court.”

Lindsay Gaze, three-time Olympic basketball player, four-time Olympic coach and father of legendary player Andrew Gaze, said of the Mormons

of this time: “Their willingness to share with their opposition was very important for us at the time. Just merely their behaviour was an influence on me personally. It made me think, ‘This might be worthwhile to be a nondrinker and nonsmoker, and have a fairly decent appearance.’”

The teams known as the Mormon Yankees even played exhibition games with Olympic teams from around the world prior to the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. Their fame grew, along with the positive media publicity, when they started defeating almost all of the Olympic teams they played against. In fact, they only lost to the Russians, who obtained the silver medal in that year’s Olympic games. They never played the American team.

Brother Blacker continued: “We were there [on Thursday Island] six months, and during that time we got to teach and coach them how to play basketball. The Catholic Church had a cement

The women’s basketball team from Thursday Island in 1961, coached by the Mormon elders on the Island.



court there on the island. We got a girl's team and a men's team. The town got together—I don't know how they got the money together—but they flew us to Cairns from T.I., and we played in a Queensland tournament in Cairns."

One Cairns-based resident, Kitty McCallum, recalls clearly and fondly that legendary game she went to watch back in 1961. "One half of the stadium was lined with all the Island people and their supporters, and the other half was all white people, and teams came from everywhere—Rockhampton, Townsville, Mackay, Cairns, Mt Isa, Charters Towers, T.I., New Guinea—people came from everywhere. T.I. teams were a real novelty. Everybody wanted to see them and see them play," she said.

Thursday Island's teams were both runners-up at the tournament. To their great disappointment, the women's team lost by only one point in the final minutes of the game.

"It was the first time Thursday Island ever had a team come down from the island for Cairns," said May. "We lost that game because they didn't let me play until the last three minutes," she added jokingly, still recalling the pain of the defeat.

Brother Blacker described the tours he was involved in where they travelled all over Australia playing the towns' best players. "We played in front of big crowds, and we opened doors because of that."

Brother Blacker related how one of the saddest days of his life was the day he left Thursday Island in 1961 to return home to America after his mission. "Most of the kids came out of school—they should not have been out of school—they came down to the wharf to say goodbye. You talk about mixed emotions. Today I still can't hardly talk about it. It was one of the hardest days of my life, saying goodbye to those kids and those good people."

"Gary was the one who showed us all how to play, and then when the other missionaries came up, they continued to show us how to play," said May.



The men's basketball team from Thursday Island in 1961, coached by the Mormon elders on the Island.

"I spent a lot of hours playing on cement down there on T.I., but I loved it. It was the greatest thing I ever did!" concluded Brother Blacker.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) established their formal presence on Thursday Island during those early years of basketball ministry, and many Thursday Island Mormon families today still trace their conversion to the faith from this landmark era in Thursday Island's sporting, racial and religious history.

Colin Burdett, a member of the 1956 Australian Olympic basketball team, said, "The Mormon Yankees were a great help to all the Australian boys because the game was pretty raw to us, really, and they taught us how to dribble properly and it helped our standard of play."

Mormon Yankees: Giants On and Off the Courts is now a DVD documentary being produced by Professor Fred E. Woods from the Department of Church History & Doctrine at Brigham Young University in Utah, USA. Various segments, including the segment "Mormon Yankees on Thursday Island," can now be viewed on YouTube, featuring a great amount of local historical footage from this important era. ■

Church Historian Says, “Tell Stories”

Elder Marlin K. Jensen, Church Historian, accompanied by Richard Turley, Assistant Church Historian, recently visited Sydney, Australia, as part of their tour of seven Pacific nations. At a fireside broadcast throughout Australia, Elder Jensen offered a strong and simple suggestion to those who value history and feel the importance of sharing it: tell stories. Stories are universal vehicles for conveying information, meaning, and testimony. Insightful and accurate history consists of stories set in context. Understanding history in its context also improves our understanding of scriptures and doctrines. ■

*Elder
Marlin K.
Jensen*



Country Church History Advisers Seek “Stories to Tell”

In 2010 the First Presidency authorised the decentralization of Church history, which will allow areas to develop collections of historical materials and stories relating to their own geographical area. As a result country church history advisers have been called in over 50 countries, including nations in the Pacific. The role of the country church history adviser is to focus on three general types of history-related activities: collecting, preserving, and sharing the “manner of life, faith, and works” of Latter-day Saints past and present (D&C 85:2).

Under the direction of the Area Presidency, Anthony Neill has been called as the country church history adviser for Australia.

Brother Neill is seeking materials of historic interest that add depth and understanding to our own local LDS heritage as well as stories of faith and dedication from Australia. Initially he needs to identify individuals and families with materials of historic interest, including photos, documents, local Church histories, and journals relevant to the Church in their respective countries. Once these sources are identified the long-term task of collecting materials can commence in a systematic way. Initially this will include scanning photos and documents where possible.

Another long-term project is to interview members with memories of the early days of the Church in their local areas as well as members who have joined the Church from a wide range of backgrounds.

Other responsibilities of the country church history advisers include assisting priesthood leaders with stake annual histories and cataloguing sites of historic significance such as graves of early members, old mission homes, former chapels and meeting places.

If you have materials, know of the existence of materials relating to the history of the Church in Australia or can assist with any of the above projects please contact:

Anthony Neill
Country Church History Advisor
PO Box 2723