

Willow Creek Stake's Semi-Annual General Conference

September 21, 2019

Program

Conducting and Presiding – President Joe Staples

Prelude Music - “My Shephard will Supply my Needs” by 7th Ward Choir

Opening Hymn #3 – “Now let us Rejoice”

Opening Prayer: Janice Samson, 7th Ward

Talks

Clair Borland, 2nd Ward, High School Senior

President and Sister Merideth, South Salt Lake Mission President

Mellisa Lindsey – Singles Ward

Terry Dejung – 2nd Ward

Hymn # 85 - “How Firm the Foundation,” Congregation

Talks

President Matheson

President Staples

Closing Hymn # 2 - “Spirit of God”

Closing Prayer: Ivin Gonzales, Singles Ward

NOTES

Clair Borland – “Times I have felt the Spirit and How you can feel the Spirit”

Spend time in spiritual places and serve others if you want to feel the spirit. Going to church helps. Center your life on Christ. Attend the temple. Seek to be in spiritual places. Serve – focus on others. Going through trials enables you to feel the spirit. Also 36:3 – You are supported in your trials.

President and Sister Merideth of the S.L. South Mission Presidency

Sister Merideth - They had been serving in Singapore and were hoping to receive a call where they could attend a temple. When they opened their mission call, they were please to discover there are 3 temples in the area they were assigned. They are the parents of six children.

Elder Suarez – Alma 17 talks about the joy of serving. Alma’s heart was filled with joy in his adversity. He knew his purpose. The mission you were sent to earth to do at this time is to help gather Israel. We will know what to say and what to do.

President Meredith: He was a young missionary in the Utah Salt Lake City mission 30 years ago this month. First doctrine of the Savior – Repent. Teach and baptize. Peter had no success fishing until the Master came and told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. “Feed my Sheep.” We can feed his sheep in very natural ways. Invite people to come and see, to come and help, to come and stay. Gospel library videos and mission section “Sharing the Gospel” include instructions on inviting others. . . Trust the missionaries to teach your friends.

Melisa Lindsey, Singles Ward – A convert of 3 years, Sister Lindsey says, “Today I am a better version of myself.” Her family were Baptists. She always knew there was a God and she thought of herself as a cultural Christian. She attended grade school, high school, college, graduate school and participated in college sports. Melissa developed medical issues and when she graduated from college, she found herself in a dark place. While driving home to Boston she kept hearing the same song in her head and discovered that listening to gospel music helped her in her hours of darkness. She began attending a Catholic church but dissatisfied with the doctrine she sought direction from a nun who told her “The word will help.” So, she bought a Bible and started reading but the questions remained. She contacted a Pentecost bishop who happened to be her uncle and attended his church. She loved the music but could not find answers to her questions.

She described herself as a coasting Christian and next attended a non-denominational church. However, she did not feel anything that differed from the other churches she had attended. Prayer was not the answer to her questions. She was exposed to the Mormon Church. She though it was a Utah cult. Two sister missionaries met her and together they attended a three-

hour block of meetings where she discovered answers to her questions. Sister Lindsey knew she had found the true church but as a black female, she did not want to join a “racist church.” She took the lessons, was baptized and moved to Utah.

Terri DeJong, 2nd Ward – Conversion is a daily process. We will have the opportunity to stand before Christ. Today is the time for us to meet God. Recently many changes have been made to help convert us. Conversion is a process not an event. Life of Joseph Smith demonstrates this. Joseph studied, translated and suffered incredible trials. Then received this confirmation: “My son, peace be unto your soul.” Conversion is a life changing process. A member of the God head wants to be with us. Each morning, ask God to give you direction during the day. Continually repent.

We have many distractions: lack of time, lack of perspective and personal selfishness. Try to eliminate anything that distracts from our goal. Feel quite and peace. Manage your time well. Have meaningful prayer.

Perspective. – God sees the ending from the beginning. Suffering trials helps us grow. Over time everything will fall into place. Man is by nature selfish. We need to become selfless. Be grateful for everything.

WILLOW CREEK STAKE PRIORITIES

Alan Matheson

In the weeks before he was called as Stake President, Pres. Staples was awakened several nights with thoughts of key issues the Willow Creek Stake needs to address. He tried to ignore what those promptings implied, but the Spirit continued to impress those priorities on his mind. After being called to the Stake Presidency, Pres. Staples shared those priorities with Pres. Smith and me. I have to admit, I, on my own, would not have arrived at the same list. As we pondered and prayed, however, Pres. Smith and I each received confirmation that the Lord wants us to focus on the issues Pres. Staples identified.

Key Message: Our loving Father in Heaven runs the Church. While the master of the universe, He is actively involved in the details. We can take comfort in knowing He is aware of the Willow Creek neighborhood, knows our specific needs, and provides detailed direction for us through our Stake President. What a remarkable blessing!

We will follow that divine direction. To that end, Pres. Staples asked me to remind you of those priorities.

- 1) Help the youth of the stake lead morally clean lives.
 - It is difficult to live virtuously in a world where God’s standards are widely ignored, even mocked.
 - We have taught and will continue to teach the Lord’s Law of Chastity. [Have to apologize to the youth that I don’t have time today to give them “The Talk”.]

- You've heard repeatedly the benefits of staying morally clean: improved physical, mental and emotional health; better and less complicated interpersonal relationships with your peers; greater self-discipline and improved self-esteem; deeper relationship with your spouse, knowing the expression of deep love through physical intimacy is shared between you two alone; being able to kneel in prayer with confidence; and having the Spirit actively guiding your life.
- Ultimately, however, we believe the key to living morally clean lives is nurturing and maintaining an abiding testimony. If we truly understand the Plan of Salvation, the fundamental role of families in that plan, and the sacred and beautiful opportunity the Lord gives a husband and wife to partner with Him in creating life and family; If we trust that our Father knows us, loves us and provides commandments for our welfare and happiness, we are more likely to resist the temptation of the moment for the unparalleled rewards promised to the faithful.

2) Prepare for what is to come.

Pres. Staples has shared that he doesn't believe our tenure in the stake presidency will be typical – simply filling callings, conducting conferences, conducting temple recommend interviews, etc. We may face unprecedented challenges, in what form, we don't know. Recognizing that if we are prepared, we shall not fear, we have called an outstanding team, led by Clint and Diane Cannon, to help us with emergency preparedness, employment, self-reliance, education, family budgeting, and more. We encourage all to visit our stake preparedness website: wcvillage.org.

Please, take preparation seriously, whether for emergencies, personal financial stability, health, or just the opportunity to develop your skills so you are better able to serve others. To the Lord, all things are spiritual. If we are more prepared in temporal matters, we will more open to spiritual matters.

3) Be a missionary-minded stake, with particular focus on contributing more senior missionaries to the Lord's effort to gather Israel.

We've heard wonderful talks by Pres. and Sister Meredith about missionary work. I'll just make a few points:

As part of our stake missionary plan, we've asked all members of the stake to invite a person not of our faith into your home during the year and have some spiritual element to that visit. [Share our experience with Terrie and the missionaries]

We've hosted two firesides for those considering senior missions and have seen an increase in those serving from our stake. Having missionaries in the field brings blessings to our stake. Those who serve come back stronger, more faithful, and better equipped to serve our stake members. Without exception, our returning senior missionaries report loving the experience. The need is great. The Missionary Department pressed mission presidents to give the bare minimum number of senior missionaries they need. We're at half that number.

With apologies to those at the last fireside, I'm going to share a quote from Tennyson's "Ulysses" that seems to apply to our more senior members: "Old age hath yet his honor and his toil. Death closes all; but something ere the end, Some work of noble note, may yet be done, Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods. . . . Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho' We are not now that strength which in old days Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are, -- One equal temper of heroic hearts, Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

May some from among "this equal temper of heroic hearts" in the Willow Creek Stake step forward to advance this "work of noble note".

4) Help those struggling with faith

There are some in our stake, some in this room, that attend church regularly, but may not be getting out of it all they want, who are not regularly feeling the Spirit. Others, having had that experience, are drifting. Addressing these saints is challenging, each is unique and their experiences are theirs alone. Their issues can't be solved through a church talk or a fireside. Recognizing that, I'll share some brief and altogether inadequate thoughts:

To those who are struggling:

Don't struggle alone or in silence. Leaders and friends who care deeply about you and want to help surround you. There is absolutely no shame in what you feel or don't feel, or in having questions. Many of us have had similar experiences. My path to a testimony has been a lifelong endeavor – a challenging, often frustrating, growing, and altogether worthwhile and rewarding experience. We love you. Reach out.

Don't wait to be fed, thinking someone else has the responsibility to make you feel the Spirit. That is your responsibility. Prepare by surrounding yourself with uplifting influences, spending regular time in the scriptures, and praying honestly and sincerely. Go to church, and about your life, looking not for what you may get, but what you can give. We need you. You have much to offer. Bring your candle from under the bushel and help light the way for someone else. The flame on your candle will grow brighter.

Take time to recognize the power of restored doctrine – human dignity and potential, eternal families, the Lord's active involvement in our lives and the Church. In Dostoyevsky's masterwork "The Brothers Karamazov", one of the main characters, Alyosha, bemoans "the disavowers of Christianity." One of the Elders in the monastery counsels him not to heed those critics, sharing words of great truth: "to this day neither their wisdom, nor the fervor of their hearts has been vigorous enough to create a higher image of man and his dignity than the one indicated of old by Christ." The remarkable ennobling doctrines of the restoration and of our immense potential far outweigh the petty complaints of critics.

To those who have loved ones who may be straying:

I've spoken with many of you during interviews. Your pain and sense of loss are real and intense. Those feelings are born of love for the wayward and faith in gospel truth.

Don't judge negatively a loved one who is struggling, even if it seems they are rejecting what you value most. Those straying are usually sincere and motivated by good values; they just haven't yet received or regained understanding or the clarity of testimony. Don't take lightly their struggle. Examining the pillars on which they previously relied is painful. Love and nurture them through their journey.

Take comfort in the love of our Heavenly Father for His children and the power of our Savior's atonement. Elder Boyd K. Packer stated:

"The measure of our success as parents . . . will not rest solely on how our children turn out. That judgment would be just only if we could raise our families in a perfectly moral environment, and that now is not possible.

"It is not uncommon for responsible parents to lose one of their children, for a time, to influences over which they have no control. They agonize over rebellious sons or daughters. They are puzzled over why they are so helpless when they have tried so hard to do what they should." It is my conviction that those wicked influences one day will be overruled.

"We cannot overemphasize the value of temple marriage, the binding ties of the sealing ordinance, and the standards of worthiness required of them. *When parents keep the covenants they have made at the altar of the temple, their children will be forever bound to them.*" [Ensign May 1992]

Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Lorenzo Snow, Orson Whitney, President Eyring and many others have made similar statements. There is power in the sealing ordinance and in parents faithfully keeping covenants that binds even the wayward child.

We are led by our Father in Heaven and Jesus Christ through our good stake president. The more I know Pres. Staples, the more I recognize his depth of character, solid faith, commitment to doing the Lord's will, and profound love for members of the Willow Creek Stake.

Willow Creek Stake members,

We had a wonderful, uplifting stake conference last weekend. To those who were able to join us, thank you for coming. If you were unable to attend, and as a reminder for all, below we've briefly summarized some of the main points from the conference.

The theme of the conference was "Deepening our conversion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Our thanks to the speakers. It was clear that each one had prayerfully considered their specific topic and then taught and inspired us. A special thanks to the Willow Creek 7th ward for being the host ward for the conference and for providing several beautiful musical numbers.

A few of the things that were shared in the talks given by women and men from the stake included: Where do I go for spiritual experiences?; The importance of feeling the Spirit; Avoiding spiritual distractions; A personal conversion story; How the Holy Ghost brings all things to our remembrance; A review of the stake priorities (assist those that might have questions or be facing challenges, help our youth live morally clean lives, be a missionary-minded stake - with specific emphasis on increasing the number of people serving senior missions, and being prepared for what is to come).

In the priesthood leadership meeting, we learned leadership lessons from the lives of the Prophet Joseph Smith, President Russell M. Nelson, and from our Savior Jesus Christ. We were also taught that questions are good. There is a place in the Church of Jesus Christ for all, no matter how big or small your faith. If your faith is strong, you can support those struggling by showing Love and by Listening (2 L's). If your faith has changed or been challenged, you can be Persistent and Patient (2 P's).

As part of the Saturday night session we talked about the blessings of being led by living Prophets, Seers, and Revelators. We issued a challenge to all as we approach general conference next weekend:

1. Arrange your schedules so that you'll have the opportunity to watch or listen to the sessions of conference.
2. Before conference, read just a little about the first presidency and the twelve (and I would add, that it would also be good to read and learn about the lives of the women leaders and other general authorities as well). It's harder to follow someone if you don't know them at all. To assist with this invitation, one of the Come Follow Me study groups from the Willow Creek SA ward found and shared this resource <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/prophets-and-apostles/meet-todays-prophets-and-apostles?lang=eng>.
3. Following conference, talk at home about what you learned and what you felt. Share your thoughts about conference with your family, or roommates, coworkers, or friends. Talk about it.
4. Lastly, find something that is talked about by one of the speakers that you will use to improve. It may have been a prompting or a specific instruction, but pick something that will be a change that helps you improve.

Then on Sunday, we spoke directly to the topic of deepening our conversion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We learned, as Elder David A. Bednar, of the quorum of the twelve stated, "Knowing that the gospel is true is the essence of a testimony. Consistently being true to the gospel is the essence of conversion. We should know the gospel is true and be true to the gospel."

As your Stake President, I felt impressed to invite Stake members to consider taking the following actions to strengthen our conversion.

1. Decide our path and stay on that path through good times and bad times.
2. Daily feed our testimony, which leads to conversion. It makes no sense to think that our conversion would be deepened if we did nothing to strengthen it.
3. Each time we feel the spirit, recognize that feeling, and “bookmark” it, in a sense. This helps us recognize when personal revelation comes to us in the future.
4. Recognize and appreciate the blessings in our lives.
5. Stand in Holy Places and with good people.

Together with us, we invite you to be actively engaged in deepening your conversion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We appreciate our association with you and pray for the Lord's blessings to be upon you.

Your friends,

Joseph Staples Alan Matheson Davis Smith
Sandy Utah Willow Creek Stake Presidency
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints