I feel privileged to speak at this unusually inspiring seminar for new mission presidents.

Last month I signed 165 letters releasing the mission president you will replace when you arrive to assume your duties. As I signed those 165 letters, I felt a keen responsibility for an even larger group, the mission presidents and companions present at this seminar for new mission presidents. The 171 presidents and their companions. Think of it! What an accumulation of consecration. I wish we could sit down with each of you individually, each for a much longer time than it took me to sign those release letters. But, as President Hinckley taught us so often, we should “just do the best [we] can.”

I will begin with brief headlines from the many outstanding messages and activities at this seminar. I wish I could say more about each. All have been inspired—edifying and valuable for missionaries and mission leaders—but time will not permit more than brief headlines from the 21 different talks and activities we have had during these three days. Finally I will address subjects I have felt to reemphasize in closing.

Summaries—Thursday
President Thomas S. Monson
He emphasized that your calls come through inspiration and that whom God calls, God qualifies.

The Lord will entrust to your care young men, young women, and senior couples, and the special bond you create with them will never end.

President Russell M. Nelson
He provided a powerful testimony of the miraculous miracle of the Book of Mormon. It is the great clarifier of doctrine. It refutes myths and affirms truths about the gospel of Jesus Christ. It reveals the doctrine of Christ. It is the instrument by which the Lord will gather scattered Israel. It is the only book that the Lord Jesus Christ has personally testified to be true.

General Officers’ Panel
Sisters Linda K. Burton, Bonnie L. Oscarson, and Joy D. Jones spoke about the resources available to help missionaries who experience emotional stress.

They taught that besides being familiar with these materials, you should seek to understand, through the Spirit, what your precious missionaries need most to help them through their challenges.

Work on relationships with your missionaries, which are vital.
They also counseled to watch out for each other as couples. Make sure you are taking a weekly preparation day to renew yourselves, spending time with each other and your family.

Elder Brent H. Nielson

Elder Brent H. Nielson reminded us that even in missions where it may be difficult to baptize, our purpose remains the same—to invite all to come unto Christ through faith, repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end. Missionaries who are committed to this are successful, whatever the outcome.

Breakout Sessions

In the breakout sessions led by leaders in the Missionary Department, we discussed the booklet Adjusting to Missionary Life, and then each couple practiced its principles and used its self-assessment forms when teaching groups of missionaries in the MTC.

The seven Presidents of the Seventy concluded the day by leading breakout sessions on how to apply the day’s messages on “Caring for Your Missionaries.”

Summaries—Friday

President Henry B. Eyring

President Henry B. Eyring reminded us of the revelation that was evident in your calls and the calls of your missionaries and taught how revelation will bless each of you as you serve.

The missionary standards will help missionaries keep their eye single to the Lord’s work so that they are able to enjoy the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. It takes revelation to do the Lord’s work the way it needs to be done.

Elder David A. Bednar

He taught us that all missionaries, whether or not they serve in missions with mobile devices, understand and have access to technology and need to learn to use it righteously. They also need to turn it off when there is no missionary purpose for its use.

Missions provide a good environment in which missionaries can learn and apply correct principles and practices for using technology throughout their lives. Teach them!

Bishop W. Christopher Waddell

He taught us that the foundation for teaching repentance is to understand and apply the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

The first step is to develop and exercise faith in Jesus Christ.

We teach and testify of Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice to help missionaries, investigators, and members develop “faith unto repentance.”

Elder Ronald A. Rasband

He taught us that because the worth of souls is great, the thing that is of most worth to your missionaries is to declare repentance so they can bring souls unto Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ suffered death and pain for all men so that we can repent and come unto Him. He rose again so that He could bring all men unto Him, on conditions of repentance, which includes a “mighty change of heart.”

Rejoice with your missionaries as their investigators progress through the process of turning toward the Lord’s way, which is the repentance we hope results in baptism.

Breakout Sessions

In the Friday breakout sessions, again led by leaders in the Missionary Department, we:

1. Were reminded to use the Safeguards for Using Technology pamphlet.

2. Concentrated mostly on how to teach repentance, practicing this with groups of missionaries now in the MTC.
The seven Presidents of the Seventy concluded the day, leading breakout sessions with “Interact to Edify,” where they reviewed what had been learned in the day’s sessions.

**Summaries—Saturday**

**President Dieter F. Uchtdorf**

He reminded us that with our missionaries, who are the best of our young people, “show how” is far more important than “tell how.”

He taught us the Savior’s command to “follow me.” Consequently, our task is to inspire and encourage and help missionaries become what Christ challenges us all to become.

**Elder Neil L. Andersen**

To help missionaries find investigators, teach repentance, and baptize converts, Elder Neil L. Andersen emphasized five points:

1. Keep your teaching and your baptizing front and center, no matter where you serve.
2. Remember, baptism is prominent in the doctrine of Christ.
3. Learn how to baptize converts with balance and permanence.
4. Always guard the flame of faith that missionaries can baptize, because miracles will follow.
5. Lead your missionaries with Christlike love and high expectations.

**Elder Gary E. Stevenson**

He reminded all of us of our personal responsibility to find and teach and baptize converts.

Though you will have many other responsibilities, you should heed spiritual promptings to seek out and invite people to come unto Christ.

We will never forget the Stevensons’ experience with the Gathright family.

**Elder Dale G. Renlund**

He taught us that establishing the Church means preparing people to be baptized, to be confirmed, and to endure to the end.

In furtherance of this vital responsibility, converts need to understand what it means to be baptized unto repentance and the other things expected of them after baptism, including church attendance and observance of the commandments.

He gave six important observable behaviors missionaries should see in their investigators to evidence their readiness for baptism, as listed in Doctrine and Covenants 20:37.

To establish the Church, we need to increase both the number and the quality of converts.

**Breakout Sessions**

In the first breakout sessions, led by Presidents of the Seventy, we were asked for our comments on working with members to establish the Church.

In the second-hour breakout sessions, also led by Presidents of the Seventy, we pursued the goal of interacting to edify, reviewing what we had been taught in today’s sessions and what we intended to do about it.

Now, we have just concluded by hearing testimonies of the Twelve.

**Finding**

Now I will speak about finding, a vital subject not yet treated at length in our seminar.

Missionaries cannot teach if they don't have investigators. Even if your missionaries have the best possible teaching skills, missionary work cannot prosper unless those missionaries also have people to teach! The importance of that obvious but sometimes neglected fact causes me to concentrate most of this closing message on finding. A major part of missionary work is to find. I urge you to keep that
vital and difficult task uppermost in the teaching of your missionaries. As Elder Andersen taught, finding is inseparable from our renewed focus on teaching repentance and baptizing converts.

Chapter 9 of Preach My Gospel has many great teachings on finding. That is your first resource. Use it constantly with your missionaries. Here are some examples:

1. On page 156, under the title “Talk with Everyone,” we read, “Nothing happens in missionary work until you find someone to teach. Talk with as many people as you can each day.

On that same page we read:

“Finding by the Spirit is as important as teaching by the Spirit. As in teaching, your efforts in finding will be effective if you are guided by the Spirit. Have faith that you will know what to teach and what to do to find those who will receive you.”

The guidance of the Spirit is important, but, like most revelation, that guidance comes when we are on the move. Seek to establish a mission culture of continual finding. If you do, it will have a profound influence on the success of your missionaries—by any measure.

Many years ago, I saw contrasting evidence of the culture of finding in a country with two missions. About an hour and a half in advance of our departing flight, Sister Oaks and I were in an airport with two mission presidents and their companions and a group of missionaries from the two different missions we had visited. As we talked with them, we noticed a difference in the missionaries from the two missions.

The missionaries from one of the missions stood and talked with us for the entire hour we were waiting. In contrast, every one of the missionaries from the other mission greeted us, said good-bye, and then went out and worked the crowd for the whole hour.

There was a very large difference in the intensity and effectiveness of those two different groups of missionaries. All were good and wonderful, but we were most impressed with those who came from the mission with a culture of using every opportunity for finding. Six missionaries in an airport for one hour can make a lot of contacts. It’s a rare opportunity to come to an airport. They saw that and were using it to the maximum. It was automatic; the mission president didn’t shoo them away and tell them what to do. The missionaries of that mission were full-time missionaries, intense in the work to which they were called.

2. Page 158, under the heading “Teach When You Find, Find When You Teach,” has some valuable suggestions. I quote:

“Finding and teaching are related, connected activities. When you meet people, be prepared to teach brief summaries of restored truth so that the Holy Ghost can bear witness that you are the servants of the Lord. In many situations, you will need to be able to present a message in a minute or less. People are accustomed to short, powerful statements. For example, you may testify of the message of the Restoration in just two or three sentences:

“After centuries of being lost, original truths of God (the gospel of Jesus Christ) have been restored by a loving God through a living prophet. We have evidence of this that you can hold in your hands, read, ponder in your heart, and pray about to learn its truth for yourself. Will you allow us to . . .”

That principle was taught by Elders L. Whitney Clayton and Brent H. Nielson in our Worldwide Missionary Broadcast on January 20, 2016.

Help your missionaries seek inspiration about brief approaches they can use to speak to people on the streets or in places where they gather—approaches that will be interesting to the people they encounter.
3. Page 160 begins the section “The Importance of Members.” As President Thomas S. Monson has taught us, “Now is the time for members and missionaries to come together.” The best finding is done when we work with members, and the first and essential step in working with members is a close and cooperative relationship with stake presidents and district presidents. Cultivate that relationship!

Do not think that work with members just means asking members for referrals. President Russell M. Nelson recently told us what a highly successful mission president in Korea told him about this. Said this president, “I tell the missionaries never to ask for referrals. They should work to earn the confidence of the members, and the referrals will come.”

Most importantly, we need to persuade members and missionaries to pray for help in this work: personal prayers, prayers in our council meetings, and prayers in our general meetings. A young missionary wrote his parents this revealing and important observation about the prayers he was hearing in his mission in the United States. He said that the missionaries were praying fervently for the members to find persons for them to teach, and in their prayers the members were praying for the missionaries to be led to the honest in heart they could teach. This young missionary observed: “Each group is praying for the other to do the finding. Interesting, isn’t it?”

4. Page 168 teaches the value of service projects. The program Just Serve, whose principles apply throughout the world and which is operational in the United States and Canada, is a great way to provide an opportunity for missionaries to mingle with nonmembers while engaging in service projects for which each has voluntarily gathered. What an opportunity for missionaries to get acquainted with nonmembers as they work shoulder-to-shoulder with them! Further acquaintanceship and teaching can develop naturally as they desire. In terms of furthering our missionary work, this kind of service is better for our missionary service time than mowing a lawn or doing other service for LDS members, as worthy as that effort is.

On how we should teach missionaries to direct their efforts in finding, I think we might benefit from a military analogy. Long ago, before current radio communication, when a battle was underway and reinforcements were trying to find the front lines and help their comrades, they were told to “march to the sound of the guns.” That same principle should apply to missionaries. We should counsel them to go to places where people congregate, unless these gatherings are demonstrations they have been told to avoid. Many missionaries do not now apply that principle. Just last month when Elder M. Russell Ballard was visiting missions outside the United States, he saw public parks crowded with people enjoying conversations on the summer evenings and no sign of the numerous missionaries in close proximity to those places. Missionaries should go where the people are.

Missionary time and effectiveness are precious resources. This fact reminds us that time spent personally with missionaries to make them better missionaries is one of the most important ways a mission president can use his time. Much of the administration of a mission can be delegated, probably more than most presidents are now delegating. But the mission president’s time that is most effective in furthering the purpose of missionary work is the time he spends with individual missionaries or small groups of missionaries helping them individually to be better servants of the Lord. And how he teaches them to use their time can magnify missionary work immeasurably.

I think it is also desirable for me to repeat the teaching we have given that presidents should return their best teachers to work in the field,
instead of locking them into leadership roles that turn them into administrative missionaries. If that is done, you will have numerous model areas for training throughout your mission.

Leading Your Missionaries

Some of you will conclude the day today by meeting with some of the missionaries who will be going to your mission. As you do, I suggest that you consider some of these ideas for your conversation with them.

1. Love them.
2. Remind them that the two of you are going into the mission at about the same time as they. This is like our journey through mortality: All of us are having new experiences and all of us are helping one another along the way.
3. This is not your mission and it is not their mission. It is Christ's mission, to be done in His way and according to His timetable.
4. There will be some discouragement and self-doubt among the missionaries you meet. Assure them that they can do it. Men and women not as well qualified as they are have become great missionaries by patient and determined service day by day along the prescribed path. Remind them of Nephi's great teaching when he was appointed to a difficult task: "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them." 

5. We are all striving to give our full attention to His work. We are called to be full-time missionaries, not part-time missionaries who spend time and concern on the things that should be left behind as we enter upon His work. We should remember the Savior's teaching: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

In conclusion, I solemnly affirm my testimony of Jesus Christ and the truth of His gospel that you have been called to proclaim. He lives and His gospel is true. He is the light and life of the world. He is the way to immortality and eternal life. To me, the miracle of the Atonement of Jesus Christ is incomprehensible, but the Holy Ghost has given me a witness of its truthfulness, and I rejoice that I can spend my life in proclaiming it. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

3. See Alma 34:15.
4. See Alma 5.
7. 1 Nephi 3:7.