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## Care for **New Converts**

*Elder Carl B. Pratt Of the Seventy*



*In building the kingdom of God, every positive act, every friendly greeting, every warm smile, every thoughtful, kind note contributes to the strength of the whole.*

Carl B. Pratt, "Care for **New Converts**," *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 11

Brothers and sisters, I bring you greetings from the Saints of southern Mexico. I was born in Mexico, as were my father and my grandfather before me. Although I was raised and educated in the United States from about six years of age, I retained throughout my life a love for and a fascination with Latin America, its wonderful people, and its kaleidoscope of cultures. Although as a child I was always aware of my family roots in Mexico and their role in the establishment of the Lord's kingdom there, my real love began when, as a young missionary in Argentina, I watched people, prepared by the Spirit, eagerly accept the gospel and I saw the peace and joy that it brought to their lives. My growing love was not just for Latin America but for the work of the Lord among the people there.

So, in 1975, with less than four years out of law school, there was no hesitation on my part when I was offered a position as Church legal counsel in South America. With three small children, my wife and I moved to Montevideo, Uruguay. We were blessed with five more children in the ensuing years, born to us in various countries of South America. Our children have been raised in the Spanish-speaking countries of the world, and each one has a deep appreciation for the diversity in their cultural and linguistic heritage.

In the past 22 years we have had a front row seat to watch the explosive unfolding of the Lord's work in Latin America. Literally millions have joined the Church in these years, and we have seen it grow from a mere handful of stakes to over 700 at the present time. We have six functioning temples and five more under construction in these countries. What a tremendously exciting time to be alive and to be involved in this great work of blessing our Father's children.

Yes, these past years have been incredibly exciting, challenging, and immensely enriching for us as a family, but we have learned much more than geography, culture, and

language. We have learned **new** and deeper meanings for words like *love, joy, service,* and *sacrifice*. For example, we have watched families save for years and then travel for up to 72 hours on a cramped bus, with small children, over poor roads, just to be able to enjoy the blessings of the sacred ordinances of the temple. We have watched humble, devoted priesthood and auxiliary leaders strive to build the kingdom and to bless the lives of the Saints, but without having the advantages of telephones or personal vehicles.

We have also learned that no one culture, people, or country has a corner on love, warmth, or kindness. As we would periodically return to the United States to visit family and friends, it would be our privilege to attend various wards in several different states. It wasn't until our children became adolescents that we began to notice differences in the spirits of the various wards. Some wards our children loved to visit because they quickly found friends among the youth, and we all received a warm and hearty welcome. But there were other wards to which our children returned with less enthusiasm, and there was a noticeable absence of the warm and hearty welcome.

We then began to observe that in some wards we visited in the United States as well as in Latin America, if we had been investigators or **new** members, we would not have felt very welcome. The Apostle Paul taught the Ephesians, "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (**Eph. 2:19**). And yet, on occasion we felt like "strangers and foreigners" in the very Church of Jesus Christ to which we belonged.

These experiences helped us become aware of the discomfort that newcomers might occasionally feel in coming to our chapels, and these made us conscious of the need we *all* have to improve what we call our fellowshiping skills. We have occasionally observed wards in Latin America, Spain, and in the United States where humble **new converts** to the Church have *not* been received with open arms or warm *abrazos*, and so we have all seen a need to improve our retention of **new converts**.

Brothers and sisters, we have the richest blessings that God can give to His children. We have the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We ought to be the most open, friendly, happy, kind, considerate, thoughtful, loving people in the whole world. Now, we do pretty well at fulfilling callings, at going to meetings, at paying our tithing; but have we learned to truly live the second great commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"? (**Matt. 22:39**). This is not something that can be assigned to the elders quorum or to the visiting teachers; this has to spring from the heart of every true disciple of Christ, a person who will look automatically and without being asked for opportunities to serve, to uplift, and to strengthen his fellowman.

We are reminded of the Savior's words, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (**John 13:35**). Will nonmembers, **new converts**, and visitors to our chapels recognize us as His disciples by the warmth of our greeting, by the ease of our smiles, by the kindness and genuine concern that shine in our eyes?

Let us pay more attention to those who are **new** to our congregations. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught: “For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? ... And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?” (**Matt. 5:46–47**).

In building the kingdom of God, every positive act, every friendly greeting, every warm smile, every thoughtful, kind note contributes to the strength of the whole. It is my prayer that we may be open and outgoing, friendly, and helpful to all who come among us. But let us give special care and concern for the **new converts** to the Church. When we detect a halting step or a stumble as they begin their journey on the gospel path, let us be there to lift and support with words of kindness and concern; let us be available to give gentle, loving counsel that will strengthen and sustain. Let us conscientiously look for occasions to show that love which the Savior admonished us to have when He said, “A **new** commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another” (**John 13:34**).

I testify that this is the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He lives, that He directs this great work, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

*Gospel topics: conversion, fellowshiping, love, sacrifice*