

Massachusetts Boston Mission Case Study

Sister Susan Fulcher

Sister Susan Fulcher, who in a recent September was serving in the Greenfield Branch of the Springfield, Massachusetts Stake, plopped down as she read of her next transfer assignment - the Cambridge First Ward in the Boston Stake. After several moments of silence, her companion, Sister Olsen, complained, "Come on, Sister Fulcher. Tell me where you're going!"

"Here, read it for yourself," Sister Fulcher instructed as she handed the letter to her companion. "I can't believe they're sending me there. I've heard that they *never* baptize anyone in Cambridge!" she complained.

"What I can't believe is that they're breaking us up," Sister Olsen responded. "We've been on a roll here. Why does President Donaldson want to end such a good thing?"

Sisters Fulcher and Olsen had indeed enjoyed extraordinary success during their five months together in the struggling Greenfield Branch. Ten people had been baptized in Greenfield during their tenure - more than in the prior two years combined. What is more, seven of those had been member referrals.

"Well, maybe the President thinks you can help that ward pick up the pace a little," Sister Olsen encouraged. "I bet you can, Sister. Who ever would have predicted that we'd meet with this sort of success in Greenfield? This wasn't exactly the garden spot of the mission before we got here, you know. Well, we're going to have a busy couple of days saying good-bye to all these wonderful people before you have to leave!"

Sister Fulcher felt a lump in her throat as she and Sister Olsen climbed into their car at the Greenfield chapel on Thursday, September 8. The Relief Society had thrown together at the last minute a good-bye breakfast for Sister Fulcher, at which they presented her with a book that chronicled the history of Greenfield, signed by every sister in the branch. As they pulled away toward Route 2 and the two-hour drive to the mission office in Belmont, they noticed a sign that a pre-school daughter of one of the members was holding: "We'll remember you forever, Sister Fulcher!" Sister Fulcher rolled down her window and waved in response. "I'll remember you longer!"

The Cambridge First Ward

At 6:00 that evening, the mission van pulled up to 15 Lowell Street in Somerville, and dropped Sister Fulcher off with her new companion, Sister Carol Pingree. Sister Pingree, a life-long member of the church from Montana who had completed three years of work at BYU towards a degree in chemistry, had been working in the Cambridge First Ward area for her entire mission - four months. Sister Fulcher, who was to be senior companion, had joined the church while a freshman at the University of North Carolina, but had been forced to drop out of school due to a tight family financial situation. She had worked as an office manager for an insurance company prior to embarking on her mission. Despite their different backgrounds, Sister Fulcher sensed that she and Sister Pingree would get along well.

When her belongings were put away in the dilapidated third-floor apartment that would be her home, Sister Fulcher asked if they had an appointment that evening. Sister Pingree replied, "No, in fact, we really only have two investigators. We're teaching a girl named Rosie, who is 19 and lives somewhere in Everett. She hangs out in Harvard Square a lot, so we just meet her at the Cambridge Chapel. The other one is Rajiv, who runs a shop around the corner. He's been very friendly, but he works every Sunday. We meet with him in the shop when things are slow."

"How about the members?" Sister Fulcher queried. "Do you work with them very much?"

“How can I answer that?” Sister Pingree wondered aloud. “It’s a big ward – a very strong ward. I guess I’d say that it’s a great ward to be a member in. But they really don’t support the missionaries much. The members don’t need us like they do in some of the smaller wards. It’s funny – in many ways they don’t need new converts, either. I talked with Sister Rizzuto out in Palmer. She said the members there are so desperate for more strength that they latch on to any investigator they bring to church. Here, if we ever find an investigator to bring to church, almost nobody comes up and welcomes her. The members are very friendly among themselves – they just aren’t friendly to missionary work!”

The Cambridge First Ward was indeed one of the strongest in the mission. About 60% of the ward members were married student couples, most of whom had small children. The remaining 40% referred to themselves as “permanent” families in that they were employed in the area, had older children, and tended to own homes.

Getting to Know the Members

With this background, Sister Fulcher asked if they had any appointments later in the week. Sister Pingree shook her head. “None this week, next week. None. I had thought we would go out tracting. One of the few nice things about these neighborhoods of three-family houses is that you can ring a lot of bells before you have to get your shoes re-soled. We’ve kept pretty good records of what streets have been tracted out.”

“I think I’d prefer visiting a few members,” Sister Fulcher responded. “Are there any that you feel close to?”

“Well, the bishop and his wife are great people. They’re in Belmont, but it takes nearly an hour by bus to get there. It’s hardly worth it. You’ll want to meet them sometime, though. They always invite us to come in and visit.”

“I’m sure they’re nice and supportive. But are there any people who have moved into the ward recently?”

“I couldn’t really say,” Sister Pingree said. “I’ve had a hard time learning people’s names. I’ve only been here three months, and everyone looks new to me. Why don’t you want to visit Bishop Bowen’s family?”

“I had a talk with one of the older members out in Greenfield several months ago, when I was asking if he could refer any people to us to teach. He said that he wanted to, and that earlier in his life there had invited lots of people to learn about the church. But he said that he had already asked everyone he felt comfortable asking. He had lived in the same house for 20 years, worked in the same company for longer than that, and had already invited everyone he knew. He rarely met new people. We actually had gotten quite a few referrals from branch members by that time, and as I looked back on our experience, most of the referrals had come from newer people – either new members of the church, or people who had just moved into the area. He sort of laid out a principle of missionary work for me. I have always felt that for me as a missionary, the probability of my meeting someone who is interested in the gospel depends on the total number of people I ask. Some percentage are interested, and the more people I invite, the more people I will teach. The same thing applies to members, I think. People who are new to the area simply are meeting a lot more people for the first time. People who have lived and worked in the same place for years may be just as motivated to be good missionaries, but they have already asked the people they know, and now just meet fewer new people.”

“Do you have a copy of the ward directory?” Sister Fulcher asked. “Maybe we could call the ward mission leader to get some ideas of new members we could visit.”

“We do, somewhere. But it’s a couple of years out of date. I think they only moved here about a year ago.” Sister Pingree located the phone number in her planner, and called the mission leader, Brother Hales. He suggested two families in the ward – the Jacksons and Muirs – who both had moved into the area within the past two months.

Jennifer and Joe Jackson

Sister Pingree phoned the Jacksons to ask if they might visit, and by 7:30 they were in their apartment on the MIT campus. The sisters learned that the Jacksons were life-long members of the church who had come to Boston so Joe could do a post-doctoral fellowship in aerospace engineering. His wife, Jennifer, was an investment analyst.

Sister Pingree took the lead in leaving a thought with the Jacksons, because she was the “veteran” in the ward. After exchanging a few pleasantries, Sister Pingree said, “We don’t want to take a lot of your time tonight, but we would like to leave a spiritual thought with you.” She pulled her scriptures from her backpack, turned to D&C 88:81, and read it aloud: “It becometh every man who hath been warned, to warn his neighbor.”

“What does this mean to you?” Sister Pingree queried.

After an awkward silence, Joe responded, “Well, it’s quite obvious, isn’t it? We’ve been warned, in that we’ve accepted the gospel, and it is our obligation to warn others.”

“How do you feel you’re doing?”

“Well,” Jennifer pitched in, “We’ve been so busy getting settled, with Joe starting his research project, needing to buy furniture and my trying to find a job, that we really haven’t gotten to know our neighbors yet. But we both served missions, and we know how important member missionary work is. We really hope we can start working with some people as soon as we get settled. Thanks for this gentle reminder.”

“We just wanted to challenge you to use this opportunity to find somebody to share the gospel with – we’d love to help you teach them!” Sister Pingree concluded.

The sisters stood to leave. Joe thanked them, and the sisters thanked the Jacksons for the opportunity to meet them. “As they walked to the door, Joe offered to help the sisters. “If you have investigators coming to church, please let us know in advance so we can be looking for them. We’d be happy to sit with them through Sacrament Meeting and Gospel Essentials Class, and even to help you teach them if you need fellowshippers.”

As they walked to catch the bus back to Somerville, Sister Pingree remarked, “They sure seem like good people, but Joe’s last comment bugs me. It’s typical of the members here. Why should it be *our* responsibility to tell *him* that we have an investigator coming to church? It’s every member’s responsibility to look around at every church meeting, and fellowship anybody they see who is visiting. Shouldn’t they just do it?”

The sisters’ conversation then drifted to their proselyting plans for the next day. They arrived back at their apartment just before 9:30. Sister Fulcher took the opportunity before it was too late to phone the other family that Brother Hales had suggested, the Muirs, to arrange a visit the next evening.

Jean and John Muir

After an unproductive day of tracting in Somerville and a quick spaghetti dinner in their apartment, the sisters began the hour-long journey by bus to the Muirs’ apartment in Belmont. “I wish we had a car,” Sister Pingree muttered as they waited at the bus stop. We waste *so* much time waiting for buses and just getting where we need to go.”

“I wish there weren’t *any* cars in the mission,” Sister Fulcher countered. “Who can you meet in a car? The nice thing about this bus ride is that we’ll have a whole hour to meet people, and they won’t be able to shut doors on us. We can just get on, each of us spot someone we want to talk with, and sit by them. They’re totally trapped.”

Sister Pingree admitted, “Well, I guess you have a point. But how about the cold winter months? And how about those Elders in areas where there isn’t good bus service? You don’t think they need cars?”

“I know I’m a bit radical on this. But if missionaries need rides somewhere, I think they should ask members for help.”

“You’re nuts,” Sister Pingree countered. “We have a hard enough time getting members to give us even a little support. I think they’d rebel if the missionaries imposed on them for rides all the time.”

“You may be right. But think how the sacrifices we make on our missions affect our feelings for the gospel. The sacrifice actually makes us feel *more* dedication. One reason some members feel disengaged from missionary work is that they don’t sacrifice for it. Didn’t Joseph Smith say something about this – that a religion that didn’t demand the

sacrifice of all things wouldn't have the power to lead men to salvation?" Just then the #28 bus rolled up, and per Sister Fulcher's suggestion, the two took seats next to two different passengers, and struck up conversations.

The sisters arrived at the Muirs' apartment just before 8:00, and were welcomed warmly. They had come to Boston for John to attend the MBA program at the Harvard Business School. Jean was a full-time mother to their two year-old daughter Allyson. This time, Sister Fulcher took the lead in the discussion. After they had introduced themselves, she said "I just *love* being in New England. And I am *so* grateful to be a missionary. Do you know what it makes me feel like? I feel like a really rich person who spends all day every day walking down the street trying to give each person she meets a \$100 bill. The gospel would make all of these people so much happier than a \$100 bill!"

"I know just how you feel," John responded. "I served a mission in Spain. It was the happiest time of my life. I always felt the spirit."

"Yes. And you know, the happiness never has to leave. Because it comes from sharing the gospel, the Spirit can be with us all our lives, as long as we keep sharing the gospel. It's funny, but I don't even feel discouraged when I ask someone to learn about the church, and they tell me they're not interested. I know I just offered them something more valuable than a \$100 bill, and if they don't think they need it, I just offer it to someone else. And I always hope that the people who reject the invitation felt that I loved them, and felt God's love for them, while I was talking with them. At some point in their lives, they might remember how they felt, and remember that it came from God through me."

Sister Fulcher smiled at Jean, as if inviting her to speak. Jean then said, "I never served a mission, and because I grew up in Utah and went to BYU, I've never really had missionary experiences. But you make me excited to start."

Sister Fulcher concluded, "I give you my testimony that the love that has come into my life as a missionary makes me happier than I ever imagined I could feel. I'm *so* excited to be in this area and learn from such wonderful members. I know that God knows you are here. He knows your names and He loves you, and he wants to bless you with happiness." Sister Fulcher then stood, gave Jean and Allyson a hug, and shook John's hand. Would you mind if we knelt in prayer to leave the Lord's blessing on your home?"

They knelt together, and John asked Sister Pingree to pray. As she did so, her voice cracked with emotion. When she finished she apologized. "I'm sorry for that. I just feel such a strong spirit of love in your home. Little Allyson is a lucky girl to be growing up here."

As they walked down the stairs from the Muirs' apartment, John came after them. "Do you have a car? Can I give you a ride home?"

"No, they don't give us cars in Somerville, so we just came by bus. We'd love a ride, but you should stay here with your family," Sister Fulcher responded.

"I'm sure Jean and Allyson would enjoy the ride into the depths of Somerville. Let me get them."

Sister Fulcher's First Sunday in the Cambridge First Ward

The next morning, Sunday, was the first time that friction surfaced between Sisters Fulcher and Pingree. Sacrament meeting started very early – 8:00 – because four wards met in the chapel. Sister Fulcher wanted to be out of the house at 7:00 in order to be at church a half hour early. Sister Pingree was still blow-drying her hair when Sister Fulcher was ready to go.

"Why do you want to hurry up just so you can wait at the other end?" Sister Pingree remonstrated. "I'd rather do a few things around here."

"I think that the time before church is the most valuable time in a missionary's week. If we're there, we can greet members and help them feel the spirit as they talk with us. It's a great time for us to get to know more members."

Sacrament Meeting

When the sisters arrived at 7:45, there were already about 30 people seated in the chapel. While Sister Pingree headed toward her customary seat, Sister Fulcher spotted a young couple with two small children on the other side, and walked straight there. “Hi, I’m Sister Fulcher. Your baby is so cute! Would you mind if we sat next to you so I can oogle over her during the meeting?”

Sister Palmisano, who had joined the church with her husband about two years earlier, cleared her diaper bag off the pew. Sister Fulcher put her backpack down and went to the other side to grab her companion. “Sister Pingree, do you know the Palmisanos? Can you believe how cute their kids are? They said we could sit by them this morning.”

“It’s good to meet you,” Sister Pingree responded. Sister Pingree opened her scriptures while Sister Fulcher fired questions at Sister Palmisano. “Where do you live? Were you raised in Medford? Do your parents still live there? How about brothers and sisters? Is this one of those famous, big, close Italian families I’ve heard about? How did you find out about the church? What is your present calling in the ward? Tell me about your husband. How did you meet?” It was clear that Sister Fulcher still had a long list of unasked questions when Bishop Bowen stood to open the meeting.

After the announcements, Bishop Bowen invited Sister Fulcher, and a new elder, Brian Jones, to stand. The elders had arrived late, and were seated on the other side of the chapel with the assistants to the mission president, who often attended the Cambridge First Ward.

It was fast and testimony meeting, and after Bishop Bowen bore his testimony, he invited others to come to the stand as they felt moved to do so. After a young father and mother both expressed thanks the prayers that ward members had offered in behalf of their sick baby, Sister Fulcher walked to the stand.

“My name is Sister Susan Fulcher. I don’t want to take a lot of your time, but I do want you to know who I am and why I came here. I joined the church about three years ago when I was a student at the University of North Carolina. All of my life I tried to live the kind of life that Jesus Christ wants me to live, and I have always known He was my Savior. I have always loved Him. But when my friend took me to an LDS church meeting and I began to see that there was so much more I could learn about this Jesus Christ – so much more about His gospel that I did not understand – I embraced this new faith. It was *so* easy. The restored gospel has given me more of everything that makes me happy – more of the spirit in my day-to-day life, more opportunities to help and love others, more opportunities for others to love me, more understanding of God’s truth, and now this opportunity to serve as a missionary. I am *so* grateful to be here, to serve you and learn from you. I have already been able to feel the powerful love you have for each other and for the missionaries. I can feel the love you have for sharing the gospel and want to thank you for the wonderful ways you help and support the missionaries. I just thank the Lord for this opportunity to serve here with you in this work that I love so much. I want you to know that I do love this gospel. I love God and His son Jesus Christ who gave it to us. And I love all of you. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.”

When the meeting ended, several people gathered around Sister Fulcher to thank her for her testimony and to welcome her to the ward. The last person to speak before going to Sunday School class was Elder Jones’ senior companion, Elder Terry. “Thanks for your testimony, Sister Fulcher. I sure hope your optimism lasts. I’ve been in this ward three months. They’re pretty good at feeding us, but that’s about all the support I’ve felt, frankly. Everybody just seems so wrapped up in their families and their careers here.”

Sister Fulcher responded, “That’s what I’ve heard. But how to you expect to change the members’ attitudes? Resent them? Stay away from them? Hope to get transferred? In my experience, we as missionaries don’t *convince* people to join the church. We *love* them into the church. If they can feel God’s love for them through the Spirit when they read the Book of Mormon, they join the church. So why would members be any different? Do you think you can *convince* members to be active member missionaries? I don’t think so. We’ve got to *love* them into this work.”

Sunday School

As they left the chapel into the foyer, the elders and Sister Pingree headed toward the Gospel Essentials classroom. Sister Fulcher, however, cornered the ward clerk and asked for a copy of the current ward directory. She

then ran to catch Sister Pingree just as she entered the classroom. “Sister Pingree, I think we should go to Gospel Doctrine, not Gospel Essentials class. Where do they meet?”

“What do you mean?” Sister Pingree retorted, showing again a bit of anger at the way her companion was taking charge. “We *always* go to Gospel Essentials class.”

“Who’s in there? The teacher, the ward mission leader, the elders. Right? Do you want to just sit there and have the Elders stare at those gorgeous legs of yours? There’s no reason for us to be there. Let’s go to Gospel Doctrine class so we can get to know more of the members.”

The lesson was on James 2:17: “Faith without works is dead, being alone.” Toward the end, Sister Fulcher raised her hand. “I just wanted to offer my perspective on what you’ve discussed, if you wouldn’t mind. I was raised as a Baptist. They believe fervently in the first half of this scripture. Sometimes I’ve felt that in the LDS church, because we’re so occupied with *doing* things – obeying all these commandments, helping other people, serving in our callings, and so on – that we emphasize most the second half of this scripture. We know in our heads that both parts are important, but our consciousness is skewed more toward works. I just wanted to bear my testimony that both parts of this scripture are true. It really is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we are saved, after we do all that we can do.”

Relief Society

Sisters Fulcher and Pingree introduced themselves to a few people as class adjourned, and then walked to the Relief Society room where Sister Fulcher quickly cornered Bishop Bowen’s wife, Kathy. “Sister Bowen, would you mind if I sat by you? I just want to get to know the sisters here, and I got a copy of the ward directory. When a sister makes a comment in class, could you please just point to her name in the directory? I’ll then just write a few notes to help me remember who is who.”

Correlation Meeting

Brother Hales convened correlation meeting after church while his family waited. He started with his usual questions about investigators’ status, but it soon became clear that neither the elders or sisters had serious investigators with whom member exchanges could be planned. Sister Fulcher raised her hand and said, “Brother Hales, I’m sure sorry we don’t have that much to correlate with you – but I do have a request that might take ten minutes. I know you want to get to your family, but I wanted to let you know that I have this agenda item, before the time is gone.”

“Well, I’m about done with my questions. What’s on your mind?”

Sister Fulcher pulled a sheet of paper from her backpack on which she had sketched a chart. “I’ve made this table up, where I want to list the members in the ward down the left-hand column, and then information about them, in the other columns – what they do professionally, where they’re from, what callings they have in the ward, and so on. I just want to get to know people as well and as quickly as I can. We can’t go through the whole ward today. But I was thinking that if we maybe went through some of them today and the next couple of weeks, it might help all of us work with the members better.”

Brother Hales started down Sister Fulcher’s list, doing his best to help her fill in the blanks. Being quite new to the ward himself, however, there were a number of people on the list that he knew little about. Unfortunately, neither Elder Terry or Sister Pingree were able to fill in any of the information that Brother Hales didn’t know. When they were done, Sister Fulcher thanked him, and then said, “You know what would motivate us to know the members better? You should give us a ‘Know Your Members Test’ in three weeks – where you pick ten people from the ward list at random, and we’ve got to tell you the information about them that’s on this table. If we get less than 60% correct, we have to take your whole family out for ice cream. If we get better than 60%, you take us out for ice cream.”

“Sounds like a safe bet to me,” Brother Hales said, and he closed the meeting with prayer.

As they walked with the elders to the bus station at Harvard Square, Elder Terry asked in a somewhat incredulous voice, “Do you really think we can learn all these names in three weeks? How are you going to do it? When I try to get to know the members, I run out of things to say very quickly.”

Sister Fulcher responded, “Elder, I actually think it’s easy. You just need to ask them questions about themselves. You can have a conversation that is interesting to *anyone* if you ask them to tell you about themselves. It doesn’t require a college education or a bubbly personality. You just have to want to learn about other people.”

Later that evening, Sister Fulcher quipped, “I figured we had to work ice cream into the equation, or those elders would never shift gears out of neutral.”

Unfortunately for Brother Hales, the elders did shift gears, and each of the missionaries passed the test. Brother Hales subsequently made the “Know Your Members Test,” with its rewards and penalties, a standard requirement for all missionaries that transferred into the ward. He raised the passing grade to 70%, however.

A New Proselyting Strategy

During the next week, the sisters changed their tracting strategy. Rather than focusing in Somerville as Sister Pingree and her prior companion had done, Sister Fulcher preferred to focus in Belmont and Arlington. The advantages of Somerville tracting had been that less time was wasted travelling on the bus – and because Somerville was densely populated with two- and three-family homes, less time was wasted walking between homes. But Sister Fulcher reasoned that daytime tracting wasn’t very productive anyway. Riding the bus to where many members lived in Belmont and Arlington was actually a better way to meet people, and by tracting in the neighborhoods in which members lived, the sisters could drop by members’ homes during the day and leave a blessing and short thought with the mothers who typically were at home with their young children. The sisters’ strategy in these visits was similar to what they had done with John and Jean Muir – call ahead to see if they could stop by, and then leave a testimony, blessing and prayer in a short, ten-minute visit. During the week they visited twelve members homes, catching primarily sisters during the day and couples in the evening.

They picked up two new investigators in Belmont – Frances Parnagian, a widow whom the sisters met on the bus, and Julia Defenderfer, who was referred by a member, Helen Cutler. The Cutlers’ son John had taken Julia’s son through the ward’s scouting program several years earlier. Sister Cutler suggested while Sisters Fulcher and Pingree were visiting in her living room that maybe Danny’s mother Julia would listen to their message. They went to her home that evening, and introduced themselves as having been sent by John Cutler’s mother. Julia invited them in and said she’d always been curious to know more about the Mormons, because her son had had so much fun in the scout troop. She and Frances Parnagian were both baptized six weeks later.

At correlation meeting the next Sunday, things were a bit more up-beat, at least from the sisters’ side. After Brother Hales worked through another third of the members listed on Sister Fulcher’s table, she said, “I just have one more thing I’d like to ask. I went through the old appointment books in our apartment, and it looks like about ten families have provided the lion’s share of the meals for the missionaries. Here – I wrote down their names. Does this seem right to you, Elder Terry?”

Elder Terry agreed. “It’s like the old 80-20 rule they taught us in freshman economics, only worse – about 90% of the meals come from 10% of the members.”

Sister Fulcher continued, “By now I know who each of these families are, and I really appreciate what they do for the missionaries. But as you look at them, most are people who have lived and worked in the same place for quite a while. I gave Sister Pingree my theory about this – that the members who are most likely to find people to refer to us are often those who are new to the area, because they’re the ones who meet more new people. Brother Hales, how do these dinner arrangements work? Do they just pass this list around Relief Society?”

“Yeah, that’s how it’s always been done. Can you think of a better way to do it?”

“I do have an idea. Could we call a sister as a stake missionary whose specific assignment would be to line up dinners for us in the homes of the members who *don't* sign up when these lists get passed around? In particular, I think we need to get into the homes of the newer ward members and the inactive members. I bet that even though the inactive members don't come to church regularly, some of them would be happy to have us to dinner. You know how easy it is sometimes to get investigators to give you referrals? I just have this feeling that some of these inactive members actually could give us some good referrals. This would help the inactive members and it could help us, too.”

Brother Hales agreed that this was a good idea, and promised to get the new system working.

Member Referrals Start to Flow

On Monday, September 25, John Muir called the sisters' apartment, very excited. “Sister Fulcher, you'll never believe this. I was just sitting in sacrament meeting yesterday and got this feeling that I should go home and call my classmate, Chip Hoxie, and ask him if he would like to learn about our church. I had never even thought about him in relation to the church until that instant. So I went home and obeyed the impression. I told him about you and Sister Pingree, and about the six discussions. He said he would take them all! Do you have time next Friday night to come and teach the first discussion?”

The discussion with Chip that next Friday went very well. Although he didn't accept a baptismal commitment, he did commit to read the Book of Mormon and to pray about it, and they agreed to meet every Sunday afternoon for the next six weeks.

The sisters stayed at the Muirs apartment momentarily after Chip had left. “This feels *so* wonderful, Jean Muir said. “There has just been a special spirit in our home all week as we've prepared for this.”

“Would you do me a favor?” Sister Fulcher asked as she walked onto the Muirs' front porch. “Next Sunday is Fast and Testimony Meeting. I'd love to have you bear your testimony about what happened here, and how it has made you feel. I think it really would help the other members.”

John agreed, and the next Sunday he was the first to bear his testimony. “Last week I was just sitting here in Sacrament Meeting minding my own business, when out of the blue I just got this thought in my mind that I should go home and call one of my classmates to ask him if he wanted to learn more about the Mormon Church. This thought was *such* a surprise to me, because I know this guy, and there's nothing about him that would have reminded you about Mormonism. Besides that, he's just somebody I know a bit, not a real friend. But luckily, I followed the impression and called. I said, ‘I apologize for this out-of-the-blue question, and before I ask it, you've got to promise me that you'll say No if you're not interested.’ He said he always says no when he's not interested, so please proceed – and I did. I said that I was a member of the Mormon church, and it always had meant a lot to me. I said that before too much time passed in this school year, I wanted to invite him to our home and explain to him a bit about what we believed.

“To my surprise, he answered that he had been wanting to learn about the Mormon Church for years, and knew I was a Mormon. He said he hadn't asked me about it because he was a little embarrassed, and knew how busy I was. I then told him about these great sister missionaries that are working in our ward, and how they have this set of six lessons designed to introduce people to the basics of our beliefs – and he signed up for all six on the spot.

“What I wanted to bear my testimony about is the spirit that has come into our home since we've been teaching him with Sisters Fulcher and Pingree. There is no peace in the world like the peace the gospel brings, when it is taught by the Spirit of God in your home. I am *so* grateful for this, and wanted to share this with you.”

The Missionary Infection Spreads

Two weeks later John Muir was sitting on the library steps at the Harvard Business School eating his peanut butter lunch sandwiches when an LDS classmate, Gary Crittenden, joined him, as was their habit. “John,” Gary began, “You remember when you bore your testimony about studying with Chip Hoxie and the missionaries? As I heard you talk, I said to myself, ‘Man, if John Muir can do that, I can do it. So this morning I asked this guy in my section if he'd like to come to our home this Sunday and learn about the church with the sister missionaries, and he said yes! I can't

believe that he'll ever join the church – he has too much repenting to do. But I just had this feeling about him and then I thought of what you said to Chip. So thanks for the inspiration! This will be fun.”

Later that same week, another LDS student at the Harvard Business School, Marv Slovacek, invited one of his classmates to hear the missionary discussions, and *he* accepted.

Sister Fulcher, of course, was elated when Gary and Marv called to ask if she and Sister Pingree could teach the discussions to their section mates. Because each of the three business school students wanted to do the discussions on Sunday due to their heavy week-day study burdens, Sister Fulcher had to shift all dinner appointments to week-day evenings. She also had to ask Gary and Marv if they could drive them to their next appointments, as they wouldn't have time to take the bus. “And one final request,” she said to each. “Next Fast and Testimony Meeting, could you please bear your testimony about what it was like to ask your friend to study the gospel – and how it has affected your family? I just get a sense that a lot of the wonderful people in the ward *want* to invite people, but are afraid. I think you could help them. Don't you just *love* the people in this ward? Sister Pingree and I are *so* lucky to be working here!”

At the November Fast and Testimony Meeting, Gary Crittenden and Marv Slovacek both bore their testimonies, as Sister Fulcher had suggested. During the meeting three other sisters in the ward also remarked about experiences they had recently had, sharing the gospel with people they knew.

One of these sisters in fact, said that she had been touched by a comment that Sister Fulcher had made when they were having dinner in her home. “Sister Fulcher just made this off-handed remark that a lot of members make a mistake when they make judgments about who is and isn't likely to be interested in the church, based upon how they look, or what their current values or life style appear to be. She said that we just can't predict who will be interested, based upon outward appearances, and she read a scripture from Samuel about how the Prophet Nathan picked David. The Lord does not look on the outward appearance, but on the heart. I just realized as she said this that I made that error all of the time, judging who might be interested in the gospel, based on whether or not they would fit in a BYU movie studio production. Just yesterday I was at a PTA bazaar and got talking with this woman. Somehow she knew I was a Mormon, and asked if there were many Mormons in the Boston area. I told her that this ward was just like a big, extended family for us, and said, ‘You should come to one of our Sunday meetings, just to see what it's like.’ And do you know what? She said she'd always wanted to know, and would like to come. I never would have picked her out of a crowd as one who is interested in religion.

“I just wanted to say to you all that I've thought a lot about what Sister Fulcher said after I had this experience, and I really think it is true. I think a lot of us, almost unconsciously, make judgments about who isn't interested in the gospel based upon how they look or live. Because we can't see into their hearts, we should try to share the gospel with *everyone* without judgment; and let *them* say yes or no. To judge them – to say yes or no for them – is to assume an awesome responsibility for one of the most important decisions of eternity.”

Finding Ways to Serve in the Ward

The next Tuesday morning, Sister Fulcher suggested to Sister Pingree that they take their an hour out of their morning proselyting time to write thank-you notes to all of those who had borne their testimonies the prior Sunday. “The Spirit was *so* strong in that meeting, wasn't it? I think that sometimes we don't thank people enough when they do things that touch our lives.”

“Do you think the mission president would let us spend proselyting time doing this?” Sister Pingree queried. “And besides, I don't even remember who said what!”

“Well, I know that the Lord would approve of our doing this, and if He approves, President Donaldson would approve. It will certainly help us find more investigators than tracting during this time of day. And I kept notes during the meeting about who said what – so we can just divide the list, and each do half.”

Serving in Primary

One November morning at the end of companion study time, Sister Pingree overheard Sister Fulcher calling Linda Huppi, the Primary chorister. “Sister Huppi,” she began, “I just called to offer you a small Thanksgiving present. Would you let Sister Pingree and me lead the music in Primary this Sunday so that you and Brother Cutler (the Primary pianist) can go to Relief Society and Priesthood meetings for once? You sacrifice so much every week, and we just thought we’d offer you a break. How about it?” Linda was surprised, but accepted happily.

“Are you crazy?” Sister Pingree protested when Sister Fulcher hung up. “We have three investigators coming to church this Sunday. We’ve got to be in Gospel Essentials Class! How can we be in Primary at the same time?”

“So?” Sister Fulcher replied. “The Muirs will be there, and the Crittendens. And remember that Joe Jackson volunteered to fellowship our investigators if we’d just tell him who to look for. Let’s just ask them to cover for us. The more we ask them to get involved with our work, the better off we’ll be.”

“But I can’t play piano well enough to just sit down and do those songs,” Sister Pingree continued. “I used to be able to, but haven’t sat down at a piano for a couple of years!”

“Oh,” Sister Fulcher apologized. “You had said that you played the piano. I just assumed that I could be the chorister and you could accompany. How about if I call Sister Bowen and ask if I can help her fix dinner for her family one night later this week, so that you can practice a few Primary songs on their piano? Gosh, I never thought about it until now, but I never went to Primary, and I don’t know *any* of those songs! *That’s* what I should have thought about! We’d better get Sister Huppi’s songbook today – or we’ll *both* be really embarrassed!”

At Primary the next Sunday, Sister Fulcher began singing time by admitting, “You know, I just joined this church a few years ago and I’ve never been to Primary – so I don’t know *any* Primary songs! I know that Sister Huppi and Brother Cutler usually teach *you* the songs, but this time, will *you* teach *me*? This means I’ll need every one of you to sing loud and say the words *very* clearly. We’ll go through a song together, and I’ll listen as closely as I can. Then I’ll sing the song back to you, and you listen to see if I got the words right. If I get it wrong, you sing it to me again, because sometimes I’m a little slow. But once I get it right, I’ll check it on this chart. If you can teach me to sing three of these songs right, then Sister Pingree and I will give you each one of these cookies we baked, to reward you for being such good music teachers! Do you think you can do it?” The children did a great job teaching the words to Sister Fulcher, and enjoyed the snack.

Laurel Class and Priests Quorum Lessons

The next Thursday evening, Annie Jones, the Laurel adviser, invited the sisters to dinner. When they had finished, Sister Fulcher offered, “If you ever want to have a lesson with your girls on missionary work or serving missions, Sister Pingree and I would be delighted to help you teach it. Please just let us know.”

Without hesitating, Annie said, “Oh, that would be wonderful – in fact, I’ve been meaning to ask for your help. Could you do it the Sunday after next?”

At correlation meeting the next Sunday, Sister Fulcher told Brother Hales what they planned to do with the Laurel Class, and suggested that the elders might want to do the same for the Priests Quorum. The elders agreed, and made arrangements with the quorum adviser that evening.

The following Sunday in the priests’ classroom, the elders made small talk as they waited for the adviser to arrive. “Do you play basketball?” Elder Terry asked a rather tall priest as he walked through the door. “I played in high school too. We’ll have to get together soon on a P-day so I can show you some of my moves.”

The adviser arrived, and after having each boy introduce himself to the elders, he turned the time over to Elder Terry, who had written the boys’ names on the board so he could remember them. Elder Terry then announced, “We decided that the best way to teach you what missionary work is about would be for us to teach you the fourth discussion.” In response to the priests’ silent stares at the floor in front of them, Elder Terry continued, “We don’t have

many investigators right now and Elder Nichols here hasn't had many chances to practice this discussion. So I thought this would be good for him, too. We want you to pretend that you are the investigator, and really give him a hard time."

In the Laurels' class, Sister Fulcher began her lesson differently. "I joined the church when I was about your age, when I was a freshman in college. Besides my mom, the person I love the most is Nancy Bittner, my high school friend who is a Mormon. We went to different colleges, but one day she called, saying she wanted to drive over to see me and asked if I'd go to church with her. That's where I found the gospel. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened to me if she had never called. I wouldn't have come on this wonderful mission. I know that you, Suzie, and you, Christine, and you, Robin, are setting Christ-like examples for the girls you know at school. I bear you my testimony that if you can find a way to bring one of them into the church like Nancy Bittner did to me, she will bless your name forever.

"Rather than teach you a lesson today, we had an idea for an activity that we wanted to brainstorm with you," Sister Fulcher said. "We met an elderly widow on the bus named Frances Parnagian, and we've been teaching her the discussions. She lives alone – her son is in another part of the country. Would you girls be interested in getting a Christmas tree with us, making some decorations, and then going over to her apartment and decorating it together?"

The girls nodded their approval, and Sister Fulcher continued. "Now, there are only three of you. I think we could help your friends find more happiness in Christmas if you each invited one friend to work with you on this project. We'll be there, but we'll just try to be friends and won't try to convert them or anything. What do you think?"

Annie Jones, the adviser, seconded Sister Fulcher's proposition as a great idea, and the girls each agreed to the plan. Annie invited the girls and the sisters to hold Mutual in her home the next Tuesday to make the decorations, and reminded them that with such short notice, they each needed to go home that day and invite a friend to the activity. That Tuesday each of the girls went with a friend to Sister Jones' home, and there, with sisters Fulcher and Pingree, they spent the evening stringing popcorn and cutting out paper ornaments.

The next Saturday Annie Jones picked up a tree, and Frances Parnagian was thrilled with the company that the Laurels and their friends provided. When they had finished decorating it together, Sister Pingree sat down at the piano and the girls sang Christmas carols. They each gave Frances a hug as they left, and one of the non-member friends asked Frances if she would let them come back the next year for another party like this one. Frances agreed.

The next day at church Natalie Bowen, one of the Laurels, came running up to the sister missionaries. "Guess what! Do you remember my friend Gayle who came with us yesterday? When we were driving home she said, 'I wish I belonged to a church that did stuff like this. It was so fun!' And I said, 'You could join, you know.' Then Gayle said, 'I'm not ready to do *that*.' So I said, 'Do you remember Sister Fulcher and Sister Pingree who were there? Their job is to teach people about what we believe. Could I invite you and them over to my house to explain a bit about our church? If you like it, then you could come to church with us – and if it doesn't seem like something you want, then there's no problem.' And do you know what Gayle said? She'd like to! When can we do it?"

By Christmas, Sisters Fulcher and Pingree had 15 active investigators in their teaching pool – ten of whom had been introduced by members of the ward. Three – Frances Parnagian, Julia Defenderfer and Chip Hoxie – had already been baptized, and six others had accepted baptismal dates. President Donaldson transferred Sister Pingree to the Fall River Branch just after the new year, and a new missionary, Sister Alice Soucie, was assigned to work with Sister Fulcher. The bishop called two women in the ward to serve as stake missionaries, to assist the sister missionaries in teaching – as their schedules had gotten so full that they were sometimes unable to see their investigators more often than once each week.

At the Fast and Testimony Meeting in early January Richard Anderson, one of the members who had introduced a work associate to the sisters, bore an interesting testimony – one of five in that meeting whose theme related to missionary work. "About a month ago I asked a colleague of mine at work, who had shown some interest in the church off and on, if he would like to meet with the sister missionaries. He said he would, so we had the sisters over to teach a discussion to him. At the end of the discussion the sisters asked him if he'd like them to come back for another meeting, and he said 'No, I really was just curious to know a bit more about what makes Mormons tick, and I think I've got a good enough sense of who you are. But thank you very much for taking the trouble to help me today – I really appreciate it.'"

“I was disappointed, of course. I had always thought that the risk of asking people to learn about the church was that if they said No, my relationship with them would be awkward after that. But the next day he came into my office and thanked me, very sincerely, for taking the time to share with him what I believed. He said nobody had ever thought enough of him to be willing to open up like that. Doing this actually has made my friendship with him far deeper than I ever imagined it could become. Rather than making it awkward, it has made our friendship a lot more natural. I just really have a testimony that God blesses us when we do what He wants us to do.”

Sister Fulcher’s Release, and the End of Camelot

In the first months of the new year, missionary work seemed to be the theme of every Fast and Testimony Meeting, as more and more members began having experiences in sharing the gospel, and as Sisters Fulcher and Soucie continued to urge members who referred people to them to testify about what they were experiencing and feeling. Even Bishop Bowen invited a bus stop acquaintance, John Williams, to study with the elders. Fourteen people were baptized between October and March, out of a total of 35 people whom the members had referred to the missionaries to teach.

In March, Sister Fulcher was released from her mission, and because there weren’t enough sisters, two elders were brought in to replace the sisters in Cambridge. Sisters Fulcher and Soucie left them with a teaching pool of twelve active investigators. Brother Hales also was replaced, so he could accept a calling to the stake High Council.

In June, Colleen Rigby, who was the wife of the new ward mission leader, was beginning her Gospel Doctrine class by going around the room, asking any visitors to introduce themselves. When everyone had finished, she spotted an unfamiliar elder in the back corner of the room and said, “Oh – and it looks like we have a new elder in the ward. Could you please stand up and tell us a little about yourself?”

The elder stood and said, “Well, I’ve actually been in the ward for two months, but my name is Elder Bennion. I come from a little place called Bennion, Utah, actually – but I’m not related. I guess that’s about all.”

Later than month, President Donaldson called Sister Pingree, who was still serving in the Fall River Branch. “I was just reading the report of one of the elders in the Cambridge First Ward, and he sounds very discouraged. They only have two investigators, and he complains that the members aren’t very supportive of missionary work. What was it that you and Sister Fulcher did that those elders must have stopped doing? Would you mind preparing a presentation to give at the upcoming round of zone conferences on what you did in Cambridge for those magical few months? In fact, I’ve been thinking that we ought to capture what you did in some sort of handbook. We need to help the missionaries for whom this sort of stuff doesn’t come as naturally, at least to do *some* of what you sisters did so well.”

Sister Pingree responded, “I’ll do my best, but you’ve got to know that the magic was Sister Fulcher’s, not mine. I’ve tried to apply here as many of the things that we did in Cambridge as I can remember. Some of the things are working great, and some haven’t gone as well. I’m sure that some of the things that worked in that ward just can’t be copied exactly in other units. But some of the lessons, I think, are universal and ought to be followed by every missionary everywhere. It’s too bad we let Sister Fulcher get away! I kept quite a detailed journal of what we were actually doing, though, so maybe I can read through the day-to-day record and see if I can see a pattern in her methods.”

President Donaldson concluded, “Well, let’s do this. Try to organize your presentation into two sections. The first should outline the fundamental principles that you learned, about how missionaries can win the trust of members and inspire them to be active missionaries. Then the second section might consist of the specific activities, tools or ideas that were the mechanism by which you and Sister implemented the general principles. These might not be able to be copied exactly in every unit by every missionary – but we could give them as suggestions that missionaries could adapt to their specific situations. I’d also appreciate your thinking about how we here in the mission office could follow up with the missionaries to be sure that they actually start *doing* these things, and *keep* doing them.”

“I’ll do my best, President,” Sister Pingree responded. “I don’t know where I’ll find the time, but this will be a good opportunity to distill what I should have learned.”