

Our 100th Anniversary Ward conference theme, based on First Corinthians 3:9-10, reminded me of another related theme at our ward conference of October (?), 1976. The bishopric at that time comprised myself, Bill Woolf, and Reese Hansen. At Bill's suggestion, we adopted the theme: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it (Psalms 127:1).

Sometime after our conference, I was sitting at dinner with three non-LDS businessmen in Joplin Missouri. Two of them were old friends. The third person had just been introduced to me (let's call him Smoke 'cause that's what he mostly did). As dinner began, one of my friends told Smoke that I was a new Mormon Bishop. Smoke did not know about Mormons so my friends explained that a Mormon Bishop was something like a Pastor but worked without pay.

Smoke was a talkative person and launched into a monologue that lasted fifteen minutes. I'll give you a condensed version of it. Smoke was a high lay official of a prominent church in the East. Once each year he organized a group to sell lobsters flown in from Maine to the people of his community. He explained all the details of the organization and execution of this annual project which required considerable effort and time on the part of many people. At the end of this, he proudly announced that the project always made \$1200.00 in profit. Then he paused for my reply.

I'm sure that I was supposed to say, "Smoke, that's really great! I've been worried sick about how we could make some money to meet the next mortgage payment on our new church building. May I use your idea?"

But I didn't say this. I just let the silence linger for an appropriate moment.

Then, softening my tone, I said, "Smoke, there's a better way. Last month my congregation turned \$15,000.00 in contributions over to me without my even lifting a little finger. Furthermore this happens every month of the year and we don't pass a collection plate". Following this, of course, I explained the principle of tithing (Malachi 3:10) and the faithfulness of our Latter Day Saints in applying the principle.

How blessed we are to provide the finances for building the Lord's house according to his own procedures.

HTH-02.02.91 adapted from a letter that I sent to our ward missionaries on October 27, 1976