

MTC an extended mission for teachers

By HANS MORAN
Assistant City Editor

For many returned missionaries of The Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints attending Brigham Young University, their brief stay at the Missionary Training Center in Provo was not just a once-in-a-lifetime experience. They have come back to teach what was once taught to them.

Pie Konchar is typical of the hundreds teaching newly called full-time missionaries for the Church. As he walked into one of the 10-by-12 foot classrooms, all eight missionaries suddenly stood up and began singing the first verse of "Count Your Blessings," a favorite hymn. Konchar seemed amused, but not surprised. As they sang, he proceeded to settle in, write on the board and prepare his materials. Then, the missionaries reached the chorus:

Konchar blessings: Name them one by one.

Konchar blessings: See what God hath done.

A smile extended across Konchar's face, slowly turning into mild laughter, while the missionaries chuckled here and there. Their countenances radiated with delight, not disrespect. They were doing this to amuse their teacher, not to defy him. Konchar simply listened appreciatively, as they concluded.

Konchar blessings: Name them one by one.

Konchar many blessings: See what God hath done.

"It was Brother Ward's idea," one of the missionaries said referring to their morning teacher.

"Oh, that little devil ... did you know his real name is 'Psycho' Ward?" Konchar asked.

Soon, he shifted to a different topic. The atmosphere changed. There was less chatter as the missionaries listened quietly.

It was obvious that their teacher was being serious now; no need to explain.

"Let's sing a hymn unto the Lord," Konchar said. And thus, another class began at the Missionary Training Center, typical of the hundreds taught daily there and in other training centers throughout the world. Returned missionaries are hired to conduct the training, provide feedback to the missionaries and meet other, less specific needs.

As early as 1885, long before the modern training centers around the world had been established, recently returned missionaries began to serve as trainers in special classes offered at the Brigham Young Academy for those called on missions.

"After having worked in the MTC for almost two years, Denise Sproul believes the teacher's role is to 'help missionaries have greater converting power,' a task teachers help accomplish through their example.

"A teacher is there to be a great example of being everything a missionary needs to be," she said, "from dressing — shoes, socks, pants, shirt, tie, dresses — to cutting their hair, to speaking kindly about all things."

Sproul also feels a need for teachers to be an example of what they teach

— namely the Commitment Pattern, the MTC's central dogma by which missionaries are trained. This pattern consists of a set of principles that help missionaries teach investigators effectively, she said.

Returned missionaries wishing to work in the MTC need not be experts with the Commitment Pattern. However, they must submit a recommendation from their respective mission president and attend a brief rating session. Then, applicants are ranked according to those results and hired as needed. Once hired, they are expected to keep a current temple recommendation.

Kevin Nelson began teaching at the MTC in September 1994, three years after completing a full-time mission in Scotland. Like many returned missionaries, he had a difficult time getting adjusted after his mission. He wanted to go back.

"I had good memories of my mission and the feelings I felt on my mission. I wanted to have that again, but I knew inside that I couldn't," he said.

His desires led him to apply for a teaching position, and he got hired.

"I just wanted to serve, to be a part of missionary work, and to help missionaries become what I wish I had become sooner in my mission," Nelson said.

Now he is serving a second, though different, mission.

For Sharam Paksima, the opportunity to work at the MTC came rather unexpectedly. Four months after returning from an English-speaking mission in India, he was recruited to conduct culture classes for missionaries called to serve in India. Shortly thereafter, his supervisor encouraged him to apply for a teaching position.

"It ended up being a lot more work than I expected, a lot more demanding than I expected," Paksima said.

His school grades often suffered during the period that he worked in the MTC. "It's worn me out. It was difficult to keep myself spiritually upbeat and doing as much as I need to be doing for my school classes."

Sproul said the greatest challenge MTC teachers face is exhaustion.

"Each teacher has 10 to 12 missionaries every single day, that they're thinking about, that they love, that they care about, that they're trying to improve," she said. "I loved my job, but it was exhausting to be one to 12 when you have a problem here, a problem there, and you have to balance everything up."

The curriculum's repetitiveness may also influence a teacher's effectiveness.

In the English speaking program, teachers repeat the curriculum in a three-week cycle, the amount of time those missionaries spend at the MTC. In foreign language programs, the cycle is repeated every two months. All agree, however, that the MTC teacher must be constantly improving and they must maintain a positive attitude.

"I always have to be changing. I always have to be improving myself and I always have to be meeting the needs of the missionaries and of the missionary program," Nelson said.

But often keeping the missionaries



Kristin Kemmerle/Daily Universe

THE MORMON BATTALION: Missionaries enter the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, to learn and prepare for two-year service. Many BYU students serve additional "missions" by being teachers at the MTC.

excited for what they're doing and working hard and consistently is a challenge because the missionaries "get small visions sometimes" in the small rooms where they spend most of their day, Konchar said.

"We have to empathize with them because this is not a natural situation," Paksima said. "It's not natural to be in class for 12 hours a day, only eating in between that and not seeing sunlight for most of the day."

That is an area in which MTC teachers play a crucial part. They claim there is a special bond created between teachers and missionaries that helps teachers meet individual needs. Konchar said this takes place as both feel the influence of the Holy Ghost.

"There's something adhesive about the power of the Spirit," he said. "When individuals feel the Holy Ghost together, they're bonded in some way."

He particularly likes the one-on-one interaction with missionaries. "It

helps both of us be motivated. They say things that enlighten me, and I learn from their example, their struggles and their blooming testimony," he said.

Nelson explained what he believes is a triangular relationship between God, the teacher and the missionaries.

"We, as teachers, need to remember that the link that's most important in that triangle is the one between the missionaries and God," Nelson said. "The missionaries don't go through us to get to God. They go directly to God, and we just do everything we can to help them strengthen that relationship."

Konchar's class demonstrated that point. As he continued teaching, the group engaged in a discussion about a meeting held the night before, expressing their thoughts and feelings freely. They seemed to remember the teacher who taught the lesson more than anything else.

"I hope you remember his words," Konchar said.

Olympic torch to cross SLC in summer of '96

By CHRIS VANLEEUWEN
Universe Staff Writer

The Olympic torch run for the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympic games will run through Salt Lake City on its route to the opening ceremonies, the Olympic Bid Committee has announced.

The Atlanta Bid Committee for the Olympic Games decided to put Salt Lake on its proposed path because of its position as one of the four cities bidding to host the 2002 winter games, the committee said in a recent press release.

The committee said the torch run will be the largest torch relay in the history of the Olympic games. The 84-day planned relay will cover a

15,000 mile journey across the country and directly involve some 10,000 U.S. citizens.

The run will begin in Los Angeles April 17, 1996, and end in Atlanta for the opening ceremonies July 19. Some of the other cities that will probably be on the route are: St. Louis, site of the 1904 Olympics; St. Joseph, Miss., where the Pony Express began its trips to the West; and Washington, D.C., site of the Olympic Soccer Tournament.

Billy Payne, president and chief executive officer of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, said the traditional Olympic flame

ceremony will be carried across Greece, from Olympia to Athens.

Olympia is the birthplace of the Olympic games. During a ceremony held at the Panathenaean Stadium, the flame will be handed over to the host committee from Atlanta for the 1996 Summer Games. This then

begins a new Olympiad, explained Payne in a press release.

Sponsored by Coca-Cola, the goal is bring the Olympic flame within a two-hour driving radius of 90 percent of the United States' population.

Working with the United Way System, the Atlanta Olympic Committee will provide volunteers to support the games. The torchbearer selection and finalized route of the trek will be announced in July.



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