

SERVANT OF THE LORD

I never imagined that I would be asked to assume positions of great responsibility within the Church. When I was baptized, of course, I did not expect to have the privilege of receiving the priesthood in my mortal life. Then, when I did receive it, I fully expected my Church service to continue on as it had, different than before only in that I now had the authority to give priesthood blessings.

However, my life as a Latter-day Saint developed far differently than the earlier scenarios I had envisioned. With each new leadership position, I became more humble and dependent upon the Lord, looking to him for help in carrying the responsibilities weighing upon my shoulders. My most recent calling has definitely carried more weight than any of the others, and, undoubtedly, came as the biggest surprise to Rudá and me. Only in knowing that the Lord had called me not because of my current qualifications, but because of what I could become, was I able to accept this responsibility.

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As with my other experiences in leadership positions, this one began with an unexpected phone call. On the evening of March 23, 1990, my daughter Aline asked me to answer the telephone; from the static she could tell the call came from the United States. Because such calls came in almost routinely, I answered it without alarm. "President Martins?" inquired the voice at the other end. I answered affirmatively. "This is President Monson calling," replied the caller.

Immediately I thought it was a joke. My former missionaries now home in the United States often missed mission life in Brazil and called me. Often, they began the conversation with some type of joke—obviously what this introduction from "President Monson" was. So, always a good sport, I went along with the joke. Whether or not President Monson realized what was happening, he also went along with my peculiar responses until, at some point, he knew a mix-up in communication had occurred. "Is this really President Martins, President of the Brazil Fortaleza Mission?" he finally asked. "This is really President Monson, second counselor in the First Presidency. Do you know me?"

At that moment I realized my mistake and begged President Monson for his forgiveness. He accepted my apology and then went on to extend an invitation from the First Presidency to attend general conference in Salt Lake City this coming April, accompanied by Rudá. We were to leave the following Wednesday, go directly to our hotel

upon arrival, and not go out too much. In taking these steps, he explained, we would avoid fueling speculation about why we were there by those who might recognize us.

After I told Rudá about President Monson's invitation and instructions, we wondered if this type of invitation to attend general conference could be a normal practice. When Rudá worried, I tried to distract her, suggesting that maybe we had done something so terribly wrong in Fortaleza that the First Presidency had called us to Salt Lake for a formal reprimand. This brought a laugh from Rudá. This little joke helped us maintain a semblance of control during the days of ambiguity leading up to our departure in late March. When we arrived at the Salt Lake Airport, we were met by an escort who took us to a hotel near Temple Square.

The day that followed was one of the most wonderful and difficult days of our lives. We nervously arrived at President Monson's office for an afternoon appointment. There, he graciously put us at ease—until he began the interview. During that meeting, President Monson told us something we never, never expected to hear: the prophet and First Presidency of the Church had called me to be a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy, for the next five years.

All that Rudá and I could do was cry. I could not find any other words to say to President Monson except, "Why me?" I felt uneasy and unworthy. When President Monson asked whether I was willing to accept the call, I

mentioned my inadequacies for this type of position. But I also remembered Nephi's declaration that the Lord does not give commands or calls without providing a way to complete the work. I believed in the Lord and humbly accepted the call. President Monson congratulated and embraced us, again counseling us to remain silent. So, we returned to our hotel and stayed there.

We then spent a restless night, trying to sleep without any success. At 6:30 in the morning, Elder Faust called. He knew how we must be feeling and invited us to his office to discuss the intimidating responsibility I had just accepted. There, he welcomed us, calmed us down, comforted us, and offered helpful counsel. Then, he called Elder L. Tom Perry, also of the Council of the Twelve, into his office and those two very special servants of the Lord gave us each a blessing. We gratefully returned to our hotel much more calm, composed, and able to control our emotions.

General conference began the next day. We continued following our instructions to remain discreet, but inadvertently ran into Elder Camargo, president of the Brazilian area at the time. "I don't know why you are here," he said, "but don't worry—I won't ask!" He and Sister Camargo then greeted us and went on without another word. We quickly found an inconspicuous place in the tabernacle for the first session.

During the second conference session, President Monson presented to the Church the names of the new

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
ELDER HELVÉCIO MARTINS

HELVÉCIO MARTINS

WITH

MARK GROVER

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