

“The Best Is Yet Ahead,” President Nelson Tells Latter-day Saints in Paraguay

Contributed By Sarah Jane Weaver, Church News editor

- 23 OCTOBER 2018



President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and his wife, Sister Wendy Nelson, greet missionaries in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.

ASUNCIÓN, PARAGUAY

Looking across the crowded convention center hall in Asunción, Paraguay, President Russell M. Nelson spoke to the thousands of brightly clad Latter-day Saints about the miracle unfolding before them.

There was not one Church member in South America at the time of the 94-year-old prophet's birth in 1924. Today, South America's diverse and capable Latter-day Saint membership numbers more than 4 million, said President Nelson during the meeting, held at the Bourbon Hotel Convention Center.

“And the best is yet ahead,” said President Nelson, speaking to reporters after the event. “We are just looking at the beginning now. It is a process.”

Paraguay is the third stop on the South American global ministry tour—which began October 20 in Lima, Peru, with member and missionary meetings as well an official visit with Peru President Martin Vizcarra. (See related story.) The following day, October 21, President Nelson addressed an evening devotional in La Paz, Bolivia. (See related story.)

President Nelson is accompanied on the second leg of the tour by his wife, Sister Wendy Nelson; Elder Gary E. Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and his wife, Sister Lesa Stevenson; and Elder Benjamín De Hoyos and his wife, Sister Evelia De Hoyos. Elder De

Hoyos is a General Authority Seventy and President of the Church's South America South Area, which includes Paraguay.

"We shall always remember what we see here tonight," President Nelson said, looking out at the capacity congregation. "We feel your great faith."



President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Elder Gary E. Stevenson of the Church's Quorum of the Twelve Apostles talk to media during a press conference in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.

In Spanish

The meeting marked the third time in three days that President Nelson spoke to large congregations in Spanish.

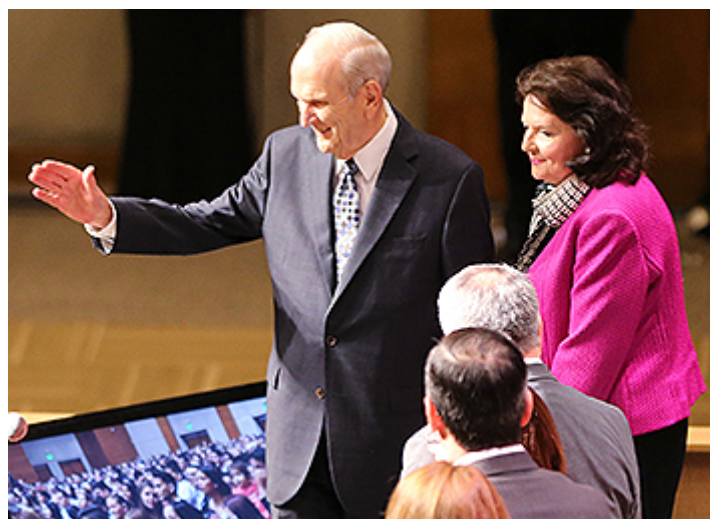
"Why? Because I love them," President Nelson said.

Elder Stevenson said when receiving this assignment, he never imagined he would need a translation headset to hear the words of the prophet.

"The Latter-day Saints of Peru, of Bolivia, of Paraguay love the Lord's prophet," said Elder Stevenson.

"They love President Nelson. It is palpable as you watch them and watch their eyes. And the second piece is deeply connected. The prophet loves the people, the Saints of Peru, of Bolivia, of Paraguay."

Missionaries



President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and his wife, Sister Wendy Nelson, enter the venue prior to a devotional in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.

Before the devotional address, President and Sister Nelson and Elder and Sister Stevenson met with missionaries from the two missions in Paraguay.

Sister Nelson said she could see and feel the light of the gospel in the missionaries, testifying of the Savior Jesus Christ.

One sister missionary shook President Nelson's hand as a tear fell to her cheek. "I want to thank that sister for her testimony," said Sister Nelson. "I will never forget it."

The Paraguayan people are so "wonderful and loving," she added. "They are children of Lehi and Sariah."

She told the missionaries that Lehi and Sariah—a Book of Mormon couple whose children started the Nephite and Lamanite peoples of that ancient American record—care about what they are doing every day.

Not many people will know what "a sacred place Paraguay is for you," Sister Nelson told the missionaries. "It is the place you will become more and more of your true self."



President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints speaks to missionaries in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.

A long journey

Two months ago, when Elder Nefi Reyes of Tujunga, California, and Elder Kon Robinson of Blackfoot, Idaho, learned President and Sister Nelson were coming to Paraguay, they immediately asked an important question: "How will we get there?"

The companionship of the Paraguay Asunción North Mission are assigned to serve in Bahia Negra, an area surrounded by dirt roads that make travel impossible during the rainy season.

To participate in the missionary meeting and devotional, the elders road on a boat for 38 hours, followed by a 10-hour bus ride. Mosquitoes filled the cramped quarters of the boat, and it rained for their entire journey.

"It was really hard," Elder Reyes said. "Even though our trip was long, it was a great blessing to be here."

It was so worth it, in fact, Elder Reyes said he would do it again.

Noting that the missionaries have to return to their area of service, Elder Robinson looked at his companion and said, "We will have to do it again."



President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and his wife, Sister Wendy Nelson, greet missionaries in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.

Growth

Margarita Riveros, who was born and raised Asunción, began investigating the Church in 1974. She was baptized June 12, 1975. Four years later her husband, Guillermo Riveros Alas, began serving as a branch president. When the first stake was created a year after her conversion, Riveros Alas was called to serve as a bishop. When a second stake was created, he was called to serve as stake president.

Alfredo Salas, area director of public affairs, said just as Elder Melvin J. Ballard prophesied in 1925, the Church has grown in Paraguay and other locations across South America.

He noted Elder Ballard "said the South America Mission would become a power in the Church. Today that has become a reality."

But, he added, "I still feel like there is more to come."



President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints speaks during a devotional in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.

Young single adults

President and Sister Nelson, Elder and Sister Stevenson, and Elder and Sister De Hoyos met with a handful of young single adults before the devotional and answered questions.

Fernanda Campos of Paraguay asked President Nelson, "How do we know if the person we are choosing to be our eternal companion is the right one, in light of the many divorces we are seeing, even among people already sealed in the temple?"

President Nelson told the young single adults the answer lies in the difference between a promise and a covenant. "A promise can be made to you without any effort on your part," he said. A covenant is made between two individuals and God, with all three being active participants.

Campos is a second-generation Latter-day Saint whose family has gone through periods of Church activity and inactivity. In her dating relations, she will now focus on preparing to make covenants, she said.

"I never imagined I would be able to see [President Nelson] and ask him a question, because he is a prophet," she said. "I love him. I sustain him. I admire him."



President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and his wife, Sister Wendy Nelson, talk with youth prior to a devotional in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.

Children

Elder Stevenson said “a connecting thread” he has observed from President Nelson on this trip is his ability witness the “love the children have for [President Nelson] and the love he has for them.

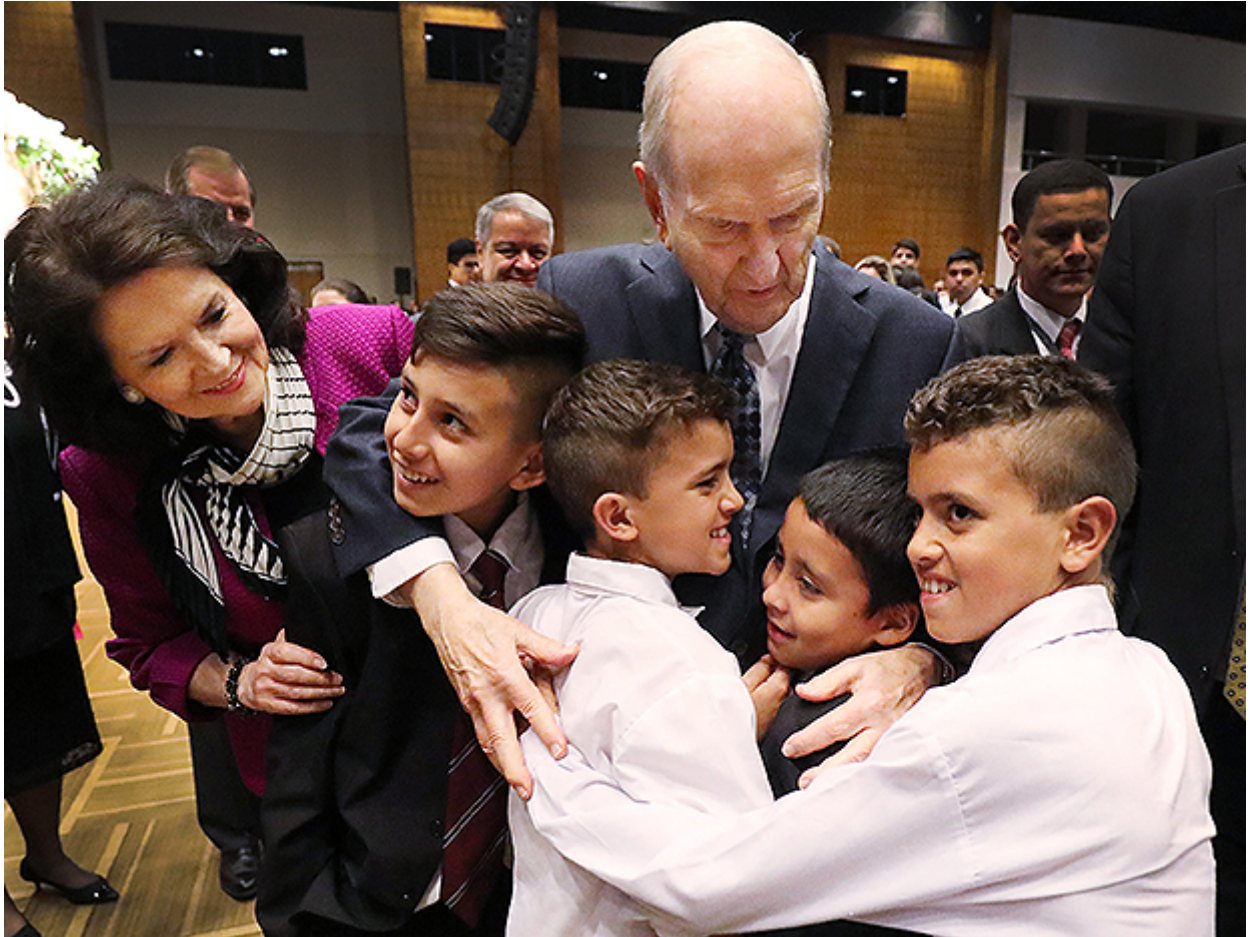
“We were touched tonight as the meeting finished and the children gathering around him. It was for me reminiscent of the Savior and His love for children.”



President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hugs children after a devotional in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.

Speaking to Church media, President Nelson added, "Isn't it interesting the children get it. They get it. We did not ask them to come, their parents didn't push them forward, they just came. That just tells you about the spirits that are in those little bodies. They have been reserved for this latter day."

Elder Stevenson said watching President Nelson so far on the South America ministry tour has taught him two things: the Latter-day Saints of Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay love the Lord's prophet. The second is that President Nelson loves the Latter-day Saints of those three countries.



President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and his wife, Sister Wendy Nelson, hug children after a devotional in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.



Lights shine at the Centenario de la CONMEBOL for a Church devotional in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.



President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints talks with Fernanda Campos prior to a devotional in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.



President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and his wife, Sister Wendy Nelson, along with Elder Gary E. Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and his wife, Sister Lesa Stevenson, talk with youth prior to a devotional in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.



Sister Wendy Nelson speaks during a devotional in Asunción, Paraguay, on Monday, October 22, 2018. Photo by Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News.

- *CHURCH LEADERS, AROUND THE CHURCH, SPEECHES AND ADDRESSES*

