

Few, But Faithful

Elder Oaks meets members in distant areas of India, Pakistan and Thailand

By Shaun D. Stahle

Church News staff writer

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As the assigned member of the Quorum of the Twelve over the Asia Area, Elder Dallin H. Oaks stepped from the beaten path to visit members in three remote areas of the Church Aug. 17-26 in India, Pakistan and Thailand. He was accompanied by Elder Donald L. Hallstrom of the Seventy, First Counselor in the Asia Area Presidency, and their wives.



Family of five in Pakistan joined the Church four months ago. Boys, in school uniforms, display testimony glove.

In New Delhi, capital of India, the visitors taught in a district conference with 347 members from three branches, constituting 54 percent of the 641 members in this northern city.

Nearly 7,000 members reside in this mostly Hindu and Muslim country. Most live in two districts in the south, including Bangalore where the India mission is headquartered.

Membership is smaller in New Delhi, a twin city to Delhi with its more common images of narrow streets and sacred cows that roam freely.

"When I last visited India," Elder Oaks said, "there were only a few hundred members in the entire country. Now it thrills me to see how our membership has increased in numbers and maturity.

"While our membership is small in numbers, they are very faithful. When I visited New Delhi in 1989, there was one struggling branch with only one returned missionary. Now we have three branches and numerous returned missionaries, including a 34-year-old district president, Praveen Bessa. He and his wife and many other members have been sealed in the Hong Kong Temple."

While they are not without their challenges, members of the Church in India, like many other Christians, are permitted to practice their religion. "They treasure their temple sealings," Elder Oaks said, noting that 93 percent of the 344 endowed members in India hold current temple recommends.

Elder Oaks, with his wife, Kristen, and Elder Donald L. Hallstrom of the Seventy and his wife, Diane, met with three families in their homes. The John family is notable for the four sons who have served full-time missions. Family members recounted how one of their most thrilling moments was attending the meeting two years ago when President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke in New Delhi.

"The people of India are beautiful and vigorous," Elder Oaks continued. "They enjoy a working democracy and are thriving economically. They have a great future in the family of nations."



Elder Dallin H. Oaks, back right, with his wife, Kristen, stand with Elder Donald L. Hallstrom and his wife, Diane. President Karl L. Dodge and his wife, Gunda Le, left, stand with members of the Chiang Mai District.

Courtesy of Elder Dallin H. Oaks

From India, Elder and Sister Oaks and Elder and Sister Hallstrom flew to Pakistan to meet with members in the Pakistan district. A weekday fireside was attended by 475. Accompanied by the 29-year-old district president, Saleem Nazir, a returned missionary, they visited the homes of various members, including a family of five who were baptized four months ago.

Only native Pakistani missionaries serve in this Islamic Republic of about 170 million people, including about 3 million Christians. "It is not easy to be a Christian in Pakistan," said Elder Oaks. Many live in Christian colonies.

From Pakistan, the Oakses and Hallstroms flew to Thailand for a district conference. Most of the more than 15,000 members in Thailand reside in the south. The Chiang Mai District in northern Thailand has about 875 members.

Thailand is an economically thriving country. Approximately 95 percent are Buddhists, though religious freedoms are granted to others.

Among the mostly first-generation members in India, Pakistan, and northern Thailand, Elders Oaks and Hallstrom emphasized gospel fundamentals in their teachings, such as a testimony of the Savior, strengthening families, priesthood keys and temple ordinances, and the need to focus on training the youth as future leaders.

During their trip Sister Oaks distributed more than 1,000 "Testimony Gloves" for Church leaders to use in teaching youth in Primary. "Testimony Gloves" are visual aids for teaching. On each finger is a picture depicting one of the five elements of a testimony. Accompanying materials were distributed in English, Hindi, Urdu, and Thai. — **Shaun D. Stahle**