

Elder Oaks visits Asia accompanied by Elder Hallstrom, Bishop Burton

Leaders greet missionaries, members in several nations

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Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve visited several countries during a recent trip to Asia, sharing instruction, blessings and encouragement with local members, missionaries and others. Also among those he visited were government officials.

Traveling with Elder Oaks were Elder Donald L. Hallstrom of the Presidency of the Seventy and Presiding Bishop H. David Burton. They were accompanied by their wives — Sister Kristen Oaks, Sister Diane Hallstrom and Sister Barbara Burton.

They were assisted by members of the Asia Area presidency — Elder Anthony D. Perkins and his counselors, Elder Kent D. Watson and Elder Carl B. Pratt, all of the Seventy, as well as a number of mission presidents.

Thailand

The Church leaders began their tour in Thailand, which in prior weeks had experienced significant political unrest and violence, but calmed the day before their arrival. On Saturday, May 22, a priesthood leadership conference held in Bangkok was simultaneously webcast to Malaysia, Mongolia and Singapore. Nearly 100 priesthood leaders were in attendance, including stake presidencies and bishops, district presidencies and nearby branch presidents, and mission presidencies. At the conclusion of the training, Elder Oaks offered a prayer and Apostolic blessing on the country and people of Thailand. President Sarawut Kanyaphan, newly called president of the Bangkok Thailand Stake, stated, "We felt the power of God descend on our land, and we are optimistic about the future for our families and the Church."

On Sunday morning, Elder Hallstrom presided over a special conference of the Bangkok Thailand Stake, while Bishop Burton presided over a conference of the nearby Pakkret District. Combined attendance at the two meetings was more than 1,000.

Referring to recent tension between political rivals nicknamed the "red shirts" and the "yellow shirts," Elder Hallstrom repeated Elder Oaks' counsel from the prior day that in the gospel of Jesus Christ we are all unaffiliated "white shirts" who strive for unity in our families, wards and stakes.

On Monday, Elder and Sister Hallstrom met with missionaries from the Thailand Bangkok Mission, some in person and all others by webcast to meetinghouses throughout the nation.

Cambodia

Elder and Sister Oaks, accompanied by Elder Pratt and his wife, Sister Karen Ann Pratt, departed Bangkok for Cambodia. On Sunday afternoon, more than 900 Cambodian Saints gathered in the Phnom Penh South District Center, and another 400 members joined by audio links to outlying chapels. Elder Oaks counseled the saints: "Our knowledge of the nature of God is one of the main things that separates us from all other religions. Members who do the following four things will be greatly blessed: pay tithing, read the scriptures daily, pray each day and partake of the sacrament worthily each week."

On Monday, missionaries in the Cambodia Phnom Penh Mission received additional instruction from Elder and Sister Oaks.

Vietnam

Vietnam's capital, Hanoi, was the next stop for Elder Oaks and Elder Pratt and their wives. [Cambodia Phnom Penh Mission](#) President Scott B. Smedley and his wife, Sister Juliet Smedley, joined them. Elder Oaks is believed to be the first member of the Quorum of the Twelve to visit Vietnam since the war there ended in 1975. A historic evening devotional was held with about 80 Saints, both local and foreign, who are members of the Hanoi Branch. An even larger branch meets in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon, in the southern region.

Church leaders from Salt Lake and Hong Kong, along with Hanoi Branch President Hoang Van Tung, met with two senior members of Vietnam's Committee for Religious Affairs, and then with Mr. Ha Van Nui, vice-president of the Vietnam Fatherland Front. In both meetings, requirements for nationwide recognition of the rapidly growing Church were discussed. News stories describing one of these meetings were published in Hanoi newspapers the following day. The Brethren were also able to meet with U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Michael W. Michalak before departing Hanoi.

Laos

Meanwhile, Elder Donald L. Hallstrom and his wife, with Thailand Bangkok Mission President Michael S. Smith and his wife, Sister Janis Smith, traveled to Vientiane, the capital of Laos. Meetings were held with high-ranking Laotian government officials to discuss the Church's status, development and requirements for national recognition. Elder Hallstrom presided over and spoke at an evening devotional of 75 members from the Vientiane Laos Branch, which had a profound effect upon these Saints working diligently to establish the Church in this corner of Southeast Asia.

Hong Kong

In the final phase of their tour, the Brethren and their wives spent several days in Hong Kong reviewing plans and progress with the Asia Area presidency, speaking to missionaries in the [China Hong Kong Mission](#), training priesthood leaders and participating in a number of special stake conferences.

On Saturday, May 29, the Brethren instructed nearly 100 leaders in a historic priesthood leadership conference. As in Bangkok, the congregation included stake presidencies and bishops, district presidencies and nearby branch presidents, and temple and mission presidencies. Elder Sam Wong, an Area Seventy from Hong Kong who conducted the meeting, testified, "This was a remarkable event, one of the largest meetings of senior priesthood leaders ever held in Hong Kong. Elder Dallin H. Oaks reminded us that we need to use the priesthood more effectively. We must magnify the roles which have been given to us as Melchizedek Priesthood holders."

On Sunday, four separate stake/district conferences were held, with a combined attendance of more than 2,600 members in the Hong Kong area who were able to receive counsel and guidance from the Brethren and their wives. Elder Oaks presided over the Hong Kong Tolo Harbour Stake conference in the morning, as did Elder Hallstrom at the Hong Kong China Stake, and Bishop Burton at the Hong Kong China Kowloon Stake. Elder Oaks and Elder Hallstrom also participated in an afternoon conference for foreign members in the Hong Kong China (English) District.

Sister Joyce Lam of the Tolo Harbour stake said, "Becoming a member of God's true Church and being taught by living Apostles and prophets is the greatest blessing in this life for our family."