

# Missionary Life-The Real Story about those Missionaries

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**by Alice H. Rampton (605 words)**

Most likely, you have seen a pair of missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints either biking or walking down a street. These young men and women are usually dressed in business attire, carrying a backpack and set of scriptures. I'm often asked why our church has missionaries and what they do. Here's a brief explanation:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been sending missionaries throughout the world since Samuel Smith went on a mission in 1830 in New York. By 1841, missionaries had traveled to England, Turkey, Ireland, Australia, The Netherlands, Germany, Canada, and Palestine. This principle is based on the scripture, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...." (Matthew 28:19-20) The Church interprets these scriptures literally and currently has over 65,000 fulltime missionaries serving in more than 160 countries. Most missionaries are under the age of 25 and go wherever they are assigned.

Missionary service is not mandatory, although it is encouraged. Many young children in the Church begin saving money for their missions at the same time they save for a bicycle. Missionaries and their families pay \$400 per month to cover rent, utilities, and food. Young men usually serve 24-month missions, while young women serve for 18 months. Whether you are called to serve in Paris, France or a more economical location, the cost is the same. Donated funds are available for youth without resources who wish to serve a mission.

A mission is a time to help interested individuals learn about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. It is also a time to grow and mature in a new setting and, often, a new culture. Missionaries always serve in companionship. Learning to get along with others is an important result of a mission. Besides teaching, they are asked to volunteer in communities. You may find missionaries serving the homeless or stocking shelves of a local food pantry. They may rake leaves for an elderly couple. They retire to bed by 10:30 pm and arise by 6:30 am for daily scripture study. The rest of the day will be spent teaching, visiting, and serving individuals. Sunday is a day to rest and attend church services. In addition, missionaries have one day to shop for groceries, do laundry, call home, rest, exercise, play sports, get a haircut, etc. They are able to call home or send emails to their families on a weekly basis. No dating is allowed during missions, but

lifetime friendships are formed. Retired individuals and couples can volunteer to serve missions that are more flexible in nature. Besides teaching about Jesus Christ, these “seniors” can choose a specific focus such as humanitarian aid, health care, education, family history, public affairs, or leadership.

Missionary service is not easy, but returnees often say it was the best time of their life in terms of experiences and personal spiritual growth. When I reflect on my own children and their spouses who have served missions, I am grateful not only for their personal and spiritual growth, but for the cultural opportunities they experienced. Because of missionary service, our family is blessed with a better understanding of the people of Switzerland, Taiwan, Arizona, Chile, Japan, Dominican Republic, Brazil, Germany, and Korea.

This is the real story – much better than the Broadway musical. So, the next time, you see a pair of missionaries from the Church walking down the street, give them a friendly wave. It will make their day!