

## LIFE AND TESTIMONY OF LAURENCE A. HARKER

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I, too, was born of "goodly parents"; Lawrence Leon Harker and Amelia LaFern Burnham, were the children of pioneer parents who emigrated from Utah to Southern Alberta in Canada at the turn of the century. Despite the physical, social and financial conditions were harsh, these early settlers established the Church in Canada, and built the temple in Cardston. I was born 10 Dec 1932 in Cardston, Alberta, Canada, the third of six children (Garth, Shirley, me, Michael, Marie and Byron). Both parents taught school in Raymond, Alberta, Canada, where I completed elementary and high school.

I first knew the gospel to be true while receiving a Patriarchal Blessing at age fourteen. That experience was for me analogous to what Nephi described as he received certainty of God's existence, His love and plan for each of His children, and His power to ransom each of us, despite our weaknesses, through the atoning sacrifice of His son, Jesus Christ. My Patriarchal Blessing promised a mission, marriage, family, a career in medical research, and success in family history.

Years later while attending the University of Alberta in Edmonton, I met a music major, Donna Parker. We soon became friends: she the non-member accompanist for the University Mixed Chorus, and I an aspiring medical student in the tenor section. With her strong Protestant background, she wasn't so sure about this "Mormon thing", but agreed to visit the LDS Institute and participate in some discussions. She liked many things about the Church, such as having Elder N. Eldon Tanner as the Branch President, and Elder Hugh B. Brown as teacher of the Gospel Doctrine class.

One night while studying for finals at the end of first year medical school, I had my personal "wrestle with the Lord". I had become increasingly troubled about not serving a mission, a decision based on the availability of ample scholarship funds for the study of medicine, together with family opposition to, and lack of funds for, the mission. After a night-long struggle I came to understand the disastrous consequences to me of not serving. I resolved to pursue the mission. The certainty of this decision was compelling, because of the overwhelming lasting benefits. That experience helped me to appreciate the account provided by Enos of his day-long struggle with the Lord to know the truth about the atonement.

Accordingly, I withdrew from medical school and the related scholarship support, and accepted a call to serve in the Swiss-Austrian Mission in May. There were many challenges with the language, culture, companions, and finances, and I gained new understanding of the Lord's promise that the gospel would be "proclaimed by the weak and simple". Nevertheless, it was wonderfully growth-promoting to partner with the Lord in accomplishing his "marvelous work" in that mission. An early highlight was singing "Bless This House" as a solo during the dedication of the Swiss Temple, German session. Later, I was blessed to develop a warm and rewarding relationship with President Curtis while serving with him in the mission presidency. A special bonus during the mission years was Donna's baptism back in Edmonton. The treasured associations with Mission Presidents Perschon and Curtis, fellow missionaries, devoted members, faithful converts, and the great people of Switzerland and Austria were deeply

meaningful. Those friendships continue to inspire and strengthen me. The most difficult part of these memorable mission years was leaving.

As promised, the Lord continued to bless me upon returning home. Miraculously, my place in medical school and supporting scholarships were restored, and I was named valedictorian at graduation. More importantly, Donna and I were married in the Alberta Temple, and became a real family when David was born. Together, we learned how richly the Lord blesses those who choose to serve Him, particularly when it initially appears to be a sacrifice.

After graduation and internship at University Hospital in Edmonton, we moved to Cardston and I joined a group practice for a year to stabilize finances before starting specialty training. We have many fond memories of the warm welcome and dear friends we came to know during that short time. Of special importance, Peter was born in Cardston.

We then moved to Montreal for two years to complete training in Internal Medicine at McGill University. Because the Montreal Ward was small, and the congregation diverse, each individual really made a difference. Donna was the Relief Society President and the mother of two active boys. She also taught piano lessons to make ends meet. Many dear friends in that ward became extended family, especially the Pitchers and Ashtons. Happily, Colleen was born shortly before we left Montreal.

To complete subspecialty training in Hematology, we moved to Seattle in 1964. What started out to be two years gradually became 18 years, as success in research led to academic advancement to Professor of Medicine at the University of Washington. We moved from student housing, to rental housing, and finally bought our own home in Seattle Third Ward, close to the University of Washington. The greatest event during those Seattle years was Jaime's birth.

Church service in Seattle Third Ward was rewarding for all of us. Donna served in the ward and stake in Young Womens and Relief Society organizations. She also had many opportunities to share her musical talents as organist, accompanist, director of musical programs, and conductor of various choral groups. I taught the Gospel Doctrine class, presided over the Elders Quorum, directed the Young Mens program, served in the bishopric, and became bishop in 1975. During those challenging years, only Donna's strength made it possible to properly balance the-often-competing demands of being bishop, husband, father, and academic researcher.

During the years as bishop we were richly blessed. The ward, our children and the research all flourished as never before. During that idyllic time many spiritually mature relationships developed among ward members that have deepened over the years, and will undoubtedly extend into the next life. Our children grew physically and spiritually. Both of our boys filled missions, David to the Austria Vienna Mission, and Peter to the Germany Hamburg Germany Mission. Colleen received a full Spencer W. Kimball scholarship to BYU. The research was accorded international status. This time in Seattle demonstrated abundantly that simple faithful servants receive inspiration, talents, power, and spiritual maturity as God uses each of us to accomplish His work. It was hard to leave the happiness we knew in Seattle.

We moved to San Diego in 1982 when I was appointed to direct a research program at The Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, California. In Del Mar Wards Donna served in the Young Womens program and taught seminary. I served on the Stake High Council, and then presided over the ward High Priests Group. During this time David, Peter, and Colleen completed undergraduate work at BYU, and Jaime attended high school at Torrey Pines High School in Del Mar. Since then, David has graduated in medicine from George Washington University, completed training in surgery, and now practices general surgery in Great Falls, Montana, where he lives with his wife Stacey, and their three children, Samantha, Kasey, and Jacob. Peter obtained his MBA from BYU and is now a CFO in San Diego, where he lives with wife Janet and daughter Mary Elizabeth. Colleen graduated in medicine from the University of California at San Diego, trained in radiology at the University of Washington, and is currently an interventional radiologist at LDS Hospital in Salt Lake City. Jaime served in the Sendai Japan Mission, and has since received her Ph.D. in English from Temple University. She presently has a position at The Heinz Educational Foundation in Pittsburgh.

Emory University Medical School attracted us to Atlanta in 1989 by providing resources to develop a comprehensive hospital program in research, patient care, and teaching. We learned to appreciate and love the south, and have come to recognize the great destiny the Church has here. Donna was immediately called to be Relief Society president in Druid Hills Ward. This highly diverse ward included university students, young married couples, established families, single-parent families, singles, and each group displayed a full spectrum of racial, cultural and economic characteristics. I was called to the Stake High Council, and then to be the High Priest group leader. In 1993 I was called to be Bishop of the Druid Hills Ward. It has been most rewarding to have this wonderfully diverse ward family develop the loving unity and mutual respect found in the gospel. The love and concern shown by each for the temporal and spiritual welfare of other members certainly fulfill the Savior's admonition to "love one another". This wonderful time has served to reaffirm that the Lord performs his work through willing hands and contrite hearts.

During the last two years the church in center-city Atlanta has been reorganized into six wards from adjacent wards and branches. Much is being learned about how to promote growth of the Church in highly complex city centers. Media referral programs are particularly effective in finding investigators. The wards are successfully retaining new converts, and the congregations are developing gospel unity. It is gratifying to see how "the stone cut out of mountain without hands" is inexorably rolling forth at an increasing pace in the south.

Donna and I are anxious to serve together in the mission field. While we have much to learn, and are sobered by the daunting responsibilities, we have implicit faith that the Lord will perform His work through us if we worthily and valiantly seek to implement His will in discharging this important stewardship. We know that God lives and that He loves each of His Children. We know that through the atoning sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ, that we can return to Him. We know that this work is directed by His prophets, and that it is a privilege to serve in His Kingdom, and help bring souls unto Him.