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Entering the world of LDS blogging

By Trent Toone | Oct 31, 2013, 5:00am MDT

GRID VIEW



LDS blogger Liz Jensen and her twin babies. | Provided by Liz Jensen

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... dear young friends, perhaps the Lord's encouragement to 'open (your) mouths' might today include 'use your hands' to blog and text the message of the gospel to all the world ... all at the right time and the right place. – President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Liz Jensen loves The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She relished her time as a full-time missionary in Croatia. She considers her faith to be the most important

part of her life.

Yet, a few years after returning home, the 29-year-old wife and mother of three was struggling when it came to discussing her faith. This troubled her.

"Why, after I've been talking about this for 18 months, is it not easier to talk about? Why am I not more natural?" Jensen said. "How can I be friends with people outside my faith like the Savior?"

Through a series of events and spiritual promptings, Jensen eventually found her solution on the Internet. Although it was intimidating at first, she became one of many church members to embrace blogging as a way of sharing beliefs and doing missionary work. LDS Church leaders have also promoted blogging as an effective way of using technology to join in conversations about the church.

"For me the prompting to share my faith online and to start a blog that was centered on faith and its everyday application was unmistakable," Jensen said. "I feel that God is being very active right now in pushing his work along, and it's been my experience that if we ask him how we can use what we have to be a part of things, he'll inspire us to know how to do so in a way that is the best fit for us individually."

From church leaders

For several years now, members of the LDS Church's First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have spoken out more and more about using technology and all channels of communication — including blogs — as a way of spreading the gospel.

In a commencement address given at BYU-Hawaii in December 2007, Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve said the Internet is the modern-day equivalent of the printing press and urged members to join in online conversations and explain the Restoration in simple and clear terms.

"You can see how important the right words are today. Words recorded on the Internet do not disappear. Any Google or Yahoo! search is going to find one's words, probably for a very long time," Elder Ballard said. "Most of you already know that if you have access to the Internet you can start a blog in minutes and begin sharing what you

know to be true. ... You do not speak for the church as a whole. You speak as one member, but you testify of the truths you have come to know.”

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, second counselor in the First Presidency, offered a similar message in his April 2011 general conference address, “Waiting on the Road to Damascus.”

“With so many social media resources and a multitude of more or less useful gadgets at our disposal, sharing the good news of the gospel is easier and the effects more far-reaching than ever before,” President Uchtdorf said. “My dear young friends, perhaps the Lord’s encouragement to ‘open (your) mouths’ might today include ‘use your hands’ to blog and text the message of the gospel to all the world ... all at the right time and the right place.”

Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve encouraged the overall use of social media in his April 2013 general conference remarks.

“For those using the Internet and mobile phones, there are new ways to invite others to ‘come and see,’” Elder Andersen said. “Let’s make sharing our faith online more a part of our daily life. LDS.org, Mormon.org, Facebook, Twitter — all provide opportunities.

In the LDS Church’s Worldwide Leadership broadcast, Elder L. Tom Perry, also of the Quorum of the Twelve, said technology would play a pivotal role in missionary work.

“As missionaries enter this new age where they will use computers in the work of the Lord, we invite the young and the old, the adults, the young adults, the youth, and the children everywhere to join with us in this exciting new work by becoming Facebook friends with the missionaries in your area on your own computers and sharing their gospel messages online and by becoming involved in missionary work yourselves,” Elder Perry said.

Jensen’s experience

As Jensen prayed and sought enlightenment for how to share the gospel more effectively, a friend asked her to read an advance copy of “The Power of Everyday

Missionaries," by best-selling author Clayton M. Christensen, and provide feedback. The ideas presented in the book gave her new insight, Jensen said.

"It not only changed my perspective on sharing my faith, but while reading two specific chapters, I felt very strongly that I needed to write and share online," Jensen said. "It was a stronger prompting than almost any other in my life."

About six months ago, Jensen created a blog she calls Thesmallseed.com. She didn't want to be "in-your-face-churchy," but found a metaphor to be fun. For her, each page view on her website represents a small seed that has been planted with a reader.

"Sometimes we underestimate the small things," she said. "A daily message that brings someone closer to Christ is a small thing, but 'by small and simple things are great things brought to pass'" (Alma 37:6).

Shortly after she started the blog, Jensen found out she was expecting twins and her pregnancy was high-risk. She spent nearly two months in a hospital bed and it gave her time to work on her blog, which became a blessing in her life during that difficult period.

"It got me through a very challenging time and allowed me to focus on my faith and connect with others on the same topic," she said. "My testimony was strengthened as I recognized that God is involved in his work."

As a ward missionary, Jensen takes her blog very seriously. Even with three young children, she spends between 10-20 hours a week managing the site with some help from two friends. They brainstorm topics to address, but Jensen relies mostly on prayer and promptings for inspiration. Trust those promptings, she said.

"I've been amazed so often that I've felt so inspired in being a blogger," Jensen said. "It's evidence to me that God really cares about this. It matters to him. He has been very direct —write about this, share that — it has been unmistakable. While I still feel insecure in my writing and what I'm doing, I want to make it what he wants it to be."

As she continues to develop her blog, Jensen hopes to emulate the Savior's kind example in communicating with others.

“Come see how I live, not because I want you to join my church, but because I’m happy, and I know so many people who are searching for that,” she said.

"In writing I hope I can in some small way help to break down the social pressure that many feel to refrain from talking about their faith and belief in God. I also hope that by blogging I can help create a community where others can connect and interact with others that also believe in God, regardless of their religion."

Thoughts and tips

Larry Richman created and manages a blog called LDSmediatalk.com with the goal of sharing technology ideas for Latter-day Saint parents and youth. Nearly 36,000 unique monthly readers from 144 countries follow his blog. 

Richman feels blessed to live in a “remarkable age of miracles.” He finds it hard to believe that the Internet has only been around for 20 years and social media for 10 years.

“God has inspired people to develop methods of communication that were only dreams just a few short years ago. Today, advances in technology are not measured in years, but in months and weeks,” Richman said. “The Lord is hastening his work and expects members to step up the pace, open our mouths, and use our fingers to tell others about the happiness that comes through living the gospel.”

When asked for advice about how to blog or using social media in sharing the gospel, Richman offered several tips:

First, share what inspires you with others. Technology makes connecting with family and friends very convenient, Richman said, so don’t hesitate to share inspiring and uplifting messages with them. The LDS Church and other sources provide countless quotes, scriptures, pictures and videos for this purpose. A quote or scripture may be just the thing a friend needs to hear that day, Richman said. “When your friend shares that quote with another friend, the effects can be far-reaching.”

Second, when you share, always include some personal comments to help others understand why you feel it is important, Richman said.

Third, use the technology you know. Not all members understand or use every communication method, but every member can share the gospel in his or her own way, Richman said.

“If you post on Facebook, occasionally share a gospel-related message,” he said. “Talk about how the gospel guides your daily life. You may be amazed at how many people will find inspiration from your experiences.”

Fourth, don't be afraid to learn something new. “There are lots of blogs and how-to videos that can teach you new things,” Richman said.

LDS.org is another source with basic blogging tips. Bloggers are encouraged to promote their posts and interact with readers by replying to comments. Write about day-to-day life, update your blog often and relate experiences or lessons learned with members at church and in family home evening, the website reads.

“Most important,” according to LDS.org, “follow the Holy Ghost's guidance as you contemplate ways you can use your blog to share the gospel.”

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