Micah Mission Story

In West Philadelphia the missionaries were bringing in and baptizing so many people into the Church that it was becoming impossible for members to give rides. There was simply too many people and not enough members with empty seats in their cars. The bishop there fasted and prayed about a solution and came up with the token system. Now, in Philadelphia a token could be used for a single public transportation use. Everyone within the ward boundaries could get to the church with one token. So what this bishop did, he got a jar full of tokens and after sacrament meeting he would shake the hands of all the members and meet them and talk to them, get to know them, and then if they required transportation, he would at that time give them two tokens- one to get home that Sunday and one to get back to Church the next Sunday. The bishop, who was a pediatrics doctor, planned on using fast offerings to pay for this but then simply opted to basically pay for all of them himself. Because of the efforts of this bishop, he started with a talent (around 90 active members of the ward) and within one year it had split into three wards all with each over 100 active members. His one talent became three talents because he sought first for the Kingdom of God.

When my family from story #11 was baptized, problems arose because that lady’s granddaughter was 12 turning 13 but she was the one who had the child ie. the great-grandson that I met on the street that day was the son of her 12 year old granddaughter. When going to church, the Oma took her great-grandson with her to class, Relief Society etc and the granddaughter went to Young Women’s. The Young Women’s President walked up to us at Church and said that she would not be accepting this girl into Young Women’s because she had a kid and that disqualified her from being able to attend that class. I was unaware of that “rule” at that point in my life and I told the Young Woman’s President that we were sending this girl in, ready or not, and she then said she was going to talk to the bishop, to which I agreed because I knew she has no keys (I did understand keys at that point in my life!) Later that week we got a call from our Zone Leaders, who as soon as we answered the phone asked us, “what did you do?!” I said, “I have no idea, what’s going on?” They said, “the bishop says he wants to talk with us tonight and he didn’t say what about.” The Zone Leaders picked us up and drove us over to the Church and the entire way there one of the Zone Leaders was chewing me out because he thought I had made the bishop upset and he was telling me all of the wonderful things the bishop was doing and we couldn’t afford to lose him “on our side” (which I totally agreed with). But I had no idea what I had done. So we sat down with the bishop who had just come in from working as a doctor, in his office, said a prayer and he looked at me and said, “Are you Elder English the one who baptized \_\_\_\_ (and he listed off some people including this little girl and her Oma)?” He then immediately proceeded to gush over me- that he was so grateful for the work I was doing, how many people we were bringing into the Church- he specifically mentioned the Oma because of the good she was doing in the community, and the Zone leader who was chastising me, his eyes grew wide in shock and sat back in his chair- he was expecting a beat down not praise. This Zone Leader got moved into the highest baptizing area in the mission and only baptized a single person that transfer (which for us was terrible, let alone in the hottest area in the mission. And the only person he baptized was somebody I had found, I will get to that in story #14. Needless to say, he was not very happy with me being out 4.5 months and baptizing 11 people in a single transfer in an area that was completely dead.)

So the conversation then changed to that of the little girl. The bishop told me that he absolutely wanted to go with my plan, have the Oma take the baby and have the girl stay in Young Women’s. He then said, “I work as a pediatrics doctor in this city” and he looked right at me and said, “I know that there is a good chance that getting pregnant was not her choice.” To which I responded, “It wasn’t, it was rape, but they were highly religious and didn’t believe in abortion”, to which the bishop said “and that’s exactly why we shouldn’t punish her for doing the right.” So we sat in that office for about an hour and this bishop wrote up a plan of action for this one little now 13 year old girl to make her feel comfortable, wanted, etc etc. There were literally hundreds of people being baptized in this bishop’s ward and he was a doctor, he had a family with multiple young children, and his time was extremely sought after. Yet, this bishop took an hour+ of his time, after work, to create a plan of action for just a single little girl.

But there is yet another story of this bishop, and that is, at that time in the Church a study had come out and the study showed that of people baptized into the Church, only 1/3 remained active one year later. They then showed how many of them stayed active in a year if they had received a calling, a friend, responsibility etc and none of them had a huge effect. Except for one, and it was “have they been to the temple within 3 months of their baptism?” If they answered yes to that, it more than doubled the retention numbers well over 80%. This bishop, reading these numbers, and knowing he would be responsible for the talents (souls) he had received, started chartering a bus (once again, with his own money) and this bus would take recent converts once a month down to the Washington DC temple (at the time it was the closest one available). They then took a picture of the group in front of the temple and began lining the halls of the church with them. If you at conference around 2005-2010 saw pictures of a bunch of West Africans in a group standing outside of the Washington DC temple, there is a good chance that this was what you were seeing. The activation of converts baptized in our mission was well over 60% (which was double the Church’s worldwide average), but this bishop maintained numbers between 80-100%. He was unbelievable.

I testify that this is a true story in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Things you can learn from this**: This bishop gave me, a young missionary, a taste of what Zion could be and should be if members sought for the kingdom of God first, if members’ desire was to build up the kingdom and to esteem his brother as himself. This bishop, to this day, was the best and most impressive example of somebody holding that mantle that I’ve ever seen. Numbers don’t lie, getting people to the temple really does have an impact. The parable of the talents is real. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth from those who neglected and/or buried their talents. And there will be weeping and shedding tears of joy for those who held the mantle, those who held the talents, and multiplied them. You don’t have to be an old missionary to be a great missionary. You don’t have to be a Zone Leader to be a great missionary. Being an old and experienced missionary doesn’t by default make you a better missionary than a younger, less experienced missionary. The same can be said for a district leader, assistant to the president etc. Lift where you stand and the Lord will make you great. The missionary makes the area, the area does not make the missionary. If you are somebody holding talents (souls), ie. holding keys, and you wish to multiply your talents, the first thing you will have to solve is the transportation issue. Members driving investigators is not and never will be a sustainable model for growth. If you wish to maintain your new talents you will have to solve the problem of getting them to the temple in 3 months. Any bishop, stake president etc that doesn’t have a transportation plan or a temple trip plan is not taking their talents seriously.