



Know Your Neighbor

INVITING ONE ANOTHER INTO OUR HOMES AND HEARTS



In the greater Boston area, our two major goals for Public Affairs are:

1. Create a climate where our Church is known for good, so people seeking for good know where to find it.
2. Nurture relationships with people in a position to endorse, authorize, or defend The Church of Jesus Christ, by partnering with them to do good.

The account of Ammon offers a step-by-step approach on how to achieve these goals.

STEP 1: PRIOR TO ENTERING THE COMMUNITY OF ISHMAEL, AMMON PREPARES SPIRITUALLY.

Ammon prayed and fasted, his mission was sanctioned by God; he and his fellow missionaries were set apart.

—See Book of Mormon, ALMA 17:3, 17; MOSIAH 28:7

As we are worthy, called and set apart, whether High Councilmen in charge of Missionary Work and Public Affairs, Directors of Public Affairs, or Ward Missionaries responsible for Public Affairs, we will receive the mantle needed to cause the Church to be known for good in our communities and to develop relationships with community leaders.

STEP 2: AMMON TAKES THE INITIATIVE; THE LORD PROVIDES THE OPPORTUNITY.

“As Ammon entered the land of Ishmael, the Lamanites took him and bound him, and carried him before the King.”

—ALMA 14:20

We generally can gain an audience with community leaders under less trying circumstances, though we may need to sacrifice time, money or comfort.

**STEP 3: WHEN AMMON OBTAINS AN AUDIENCE WITH KING LAMONI,
HE ASKS — HOW CAN I CONTRIBUTE?**

“I desire to dwell among this people for a time; yea, and perhaps until the day I die... and be thy servant.”

—ALMA 17:21–22

How Ammon approached the King is important. Ammon didn't tell the King that he and a group of his friends would guard the King's territory, but rather he offered to work WITH the King's servants to protect the flocks. Nor did he specify a timeframe, willing to stay until the Spirit called him elsewhere. As royalty, King Lamoni most likely recognized Ammon as the son of King Mosiah, making Ammon's display of humility and willingness to work within the land of Ishmael more impressive.

The recent Opinion Former survey conducted in major U.S. cities, including Boston, indicates that members of The Church of Jesus Christ are viewed as "hard workers," "good neighbors," and "service-oriented." It also identified them as "narrow-minded," "arrogant," and "self-righteous." Do these last three adjectives describe us in any way? A willingness to work *with* our communities will perpetuate positive views while dispelling those that are negative.

STEP 4: AMMON WORKS ALONGSIDE HIS NEIGHBORS TO BETTER THE COMMUNITY

When the enemies of the king scattered the flocks, Ammon said "My brethren let us go in search of the flocks, and we will gather them back unto the place of the water." When the flocks are scattered again, Ammon says "I [will go and] contend with these men who do scatter our flocks." —ALMA 17:31–36

Ammon refers to his fellow workers as his brethren. He refers to the flocks as *our* flocks: word choice is a strong indicator of our values—one that in this case implies inclusion. Do we refer to people as non-members or non-LDS or to all people as our friends and neighbors?

In his sermon "Doctrine of Inclusion," Elder Ballard teaches, "for the most part, our neighbors not of our faith are good, honorable people—every bit as good and honorable as we strive to be." In other words, they want to protect the King's flocks as much as we want to.

STEP 5: BECAUSE OF HIS HARD WORK, LOYALTY, AND COLLEGIALITY, AMMON'S NEIGHBORS ENDORSE THE CHURCH

As the King inquires about Ammon's feats, "[The servants answer]...whether he be the Great Spirit or a man, we know not: But this much we do know...that he is a friend to the king." —ALMA 18:3

Having been befriended by and defended by Ammon, these neighbors freely endorse Ammon, saying to the King – you must know this man.

STEP 6: IN TURN, KING LAMONI AND QUEEN LAMONI ASK TO MEET WITH AMMON...

King Lamoni's interest now piqued, he asks to meet with Ammon. "Where is this man that has such great power?" [ALMA 18:8] "The queen having heard of the fame of Ammon" sends for him [ALMA 19:2].

King Lamoni didn't request a meeting to be polite; King Lamoni wanted to know Ammon because of his deeds, as did the Queen.

STEP 7: ...AND AUTHORIZE THE BUILDING OF CHURCHES AND TEMPLES

"And thus the work of the Lord did commence among the Lamanites" and King Lamoni "declared [unto the people] that they might have the liberty of worshipping the Lord their God according to their desires." —ALMA 19: 36; 21: 22

STEP 8: KING LAMONI EVENTUALLY IMPERILS HIS LIFE TO DEFEND AMMON AND THE CHURCH

When Ammon and King Lamoni meet his father who is also the Head of State, his father rages, "Whither art thou going with this Nephite, who is one of the children of a liar?" commanding King Lamoni to kill Ammon and return to Ishmael. —ALMA 20:8-10

Lamoni responds, "I will not slay Ammon, neither will I return to the land of Ishmael, but I go to the land of Middoni that I may release the brethren of Ammon, for I know that they are just men and holy prophets of the true God." (Alma 20:15)

Not only did King Lamoni authorize the establishment of the Church in his land, he journeyed to another city to advocate for Ammon's associates, jeopardized his relationship with his father and imperiled his life to defend Ammon.

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Let's stop here in the account, and assume for just a moment that, all other things being equal, King Lamoni did not convert to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Was Ammon still successful?

If that success is measured by the public affairs goals of the greater Boston area, then the answer is definitely yes.

Was the name of The Church of Jesus Christ now known for good in the community of Ishmael?

Because of Ammon, were the community leaders in a position to endorse, authorize or defend The Church of Jesus Christ?

Let's ask some more specific questions:

1. If an Opinion Former survey had been conducted prior to Ammon arriving in the Land of Ishmael, what would the Opinion Formers have said?

If I see a Nephite within our borders, first I'll rob him, and then I'll kill him. (See ALMA 17:15.)

2. If an Opinion Former survey had been conducted after Ammon had lived and worked in Ishmael, what would the Opinion Former survey have said?

Something to similar to the testimony of King Lamoni's servants "we know that [Ammon] is a friend of the King." —ALMA 18:3

3. If a story about the Church were printed in the "Ishamel Independent," one which Ammon asserted was false, would the king's press secretary write an editorial defending the Church's reputation?

Yes. And it would include the phrase "I will believe all [the] words of [Ammon]" —ALMA 18:23

4. If there were a major post to fill in the government of Ishmael, would King Lamoni endorse Ammon and his associates?

"There has not been any servant among all my servants that has been so faithful as this man." —ALMA 18:10

5. If Mission President Alma wanted to send more missionaries into Ishmael, would visas be available? If a new temple (e.g. Machu Pichu) or chapel needed to be built, would the land of Ishmael's Zoning Board authorize the request?

Lamoni said, "Whatsoever thou desirest of me I will grant it unto thee." —ALMA 18:21

6. If the "Lamoni Ledger" were to interview King Lamoni and the father of King Lamoni, asking them, "Is there really anything special about Ammon and Aaron?" what would they have said?

The father of King Lamoni is likely to recount two events: 1. A conversation with Aaron in which he recalls how Ammon treated his son "I have been somewhat troubled in mind because of the generosity and the greatest of the words of thy brother." (ALMA 22: 3); 2. That he (the father) had been perplexed by Ammon's decision to not stay and teach him (as courtier would do typically do), because "behold the Spirit of the Lord call[ed] him another way." (ALMA 22:3)

7. When an opinion former or the press asks about the Church, is it wrong to list all the good that has been done?

When King Lamoni asks for Ammon to come before him, Ammon asks, "[Dost thou desire to see me] because thou hast heard that I defended thy servants and thy flocks, and slew seven of their brethren...and smote off the arms of others.... Is this the cause of thy marvellings?" (ALMA 18: 16)

8. If we consider Ammon an analog for "making friendships with community leaders/community service, we should consider Abish for creating "positive articles in the press." Do we need both?

"Supposing this opportunity, by making known unto the people what had happened among them...would cause them to believe in the power of God, [Abish] ran forth from house to house....and [the people] began to assemble...and there came a multitude..."

Once Abish had disseminated the truth widely and the people assembled, "the King arose, and... began to teach them the words which he had heard from the mouth of Ammon...and as many as heard his words believed, and were converted unto the Lord." (ALMA 19: 17, 19, 28, 30-31)

It is difficult to have one without the other. As Elder Clayton Christensen observes, "public affairs and missionary work are "two sides of the same coin." The Lord uses both to move forward His work.

Because of Ammon:

- » The name of The Church of Jesus Christ was now known for good in the community of Ishmael.
- » The community leaders were in a position to authorize, defend or endorse The Church of Jesus Christ.
- » We learn that public affairs work often precedes missionary opportunities.

Though Ammon lived thousands of years ago, the spirit of Ammon lives on and applies to our lives today. Here are just a few modern-day examples of public affairs work.

- I. *Los Angeles, California* - Chinese businessmen, Paul Lai and Alex Hseih, and members of the LDS Church have spent thousands of dollars of their own money to take out ads (e.g. printing a translation of The Proclamation to the World) in the *Chinese Daily News* (circulation - 50K+). Because of their investment, when the Church launched a new genealogy resource (the 1880 Census) at the University of Southern California, the Chinese press was willing to cover the event. As the press discovered how much the LDS Church reveres its ancestry (as evidenced by its investment in family history), the editor and religion writer at the *Chinese Daily News* were willing and interested in taking a VIP tour to Salt Lake City. They subsequently wrote and published an 8-part mini-series on the Church for their paper.

— LEANNE HULL, PUBLIC AFFAIRS, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

2. *Boston, Massachusetts* - In the 1970s, several LDS families in the Belmont Ward enrolled their sons in the community Cub Scout pack. Clay Christensen volunteered to be the Wolf den leader, pack master, and served in a leadership position for 8 years. When the local elementary school, Winn Brook, had to be closed for renovation, Pack meetings were held in the Belmont chapel for 2 years — every month bringing hundreds of people to the Church.

When individual residents in the Belmont area organized to oppose the construction of the Boston temple in their neighborhood, Cheryl Shushan, the president of the Village Hill Neighborhood Association, supported the temple actively and caused the association not to take a stand in opposition. Ms. Shushan's twin sons had been members of the Belmont Ward's Cub Scout den and earned their Eagle Scout awards through the Boy Scout program sponsored by the Belmont Ward.

— ELDER CLAYTON M. CHRISTENSEN, PUBLIC AFFAIRS CHAIR, BOSTON

3. *Houston, Texas* - After several attempts to promote individual community volunteerism among stake members, Stake President Al Haines was prompted to have the stake focus its community relations efforts on a few organizations so that long-term relationships could be established. Under the direction of the Stake Presidency and High Council, the Public Affairs Director conducted due diligence on numerous organizations, and eventually the stake leadership decided to focus its support primarily on the Northwest Assistance Ministries (NAM), a well-respected interfaith social service agency. The scope of the stake's commitment to NAM was such that the Stake President and Stake Community Relations specialist Chris Fults served on both the Executive Board and Board of Trustees. Over the years, the Church took the lead on some activities (e.g. Interfaith Quilting Bee) while also supporting activities initiated by other community groups (e.g. Interfaith Hospitality Network).

— SISTER CHRIS FULTS, PUBLIC AFFAIRS, HOUSTON

4. *Sacramento, California* - In an article titled “Richard Montgomery— Building Unity Through Interfaith Understanding and Cooperation” (*Sacramento News and Review*, Sep 8, 2004), reporter Melissa Patrice quotes President Hinckley’s 1998 General Conference address admonishing the Saints to “work with other religions in the defense of those values that have made our civilization great,” noting that Bro. Montgomery has fully embraced this directive. A Bishop for twelve years, Stake president for ten, Public Affairs Director for eight, Elder Montgomery was president of the Sacramento Interfaith Service Bureau for three years. As head of that bureau, he encouraged members of our Church to reach out through service and humanitarian assistance.

5. *Franklin, Massachusetts* - Once property was purchased for a stake center in Franklin, MA, local businessman Mike Doherty indicated to Bro. Shannon Zollo there were reservations about the “Mormons coming to town.” After prayerful consideration, Bro. Zollo apprised President Cox of the situation. Pres. Cox in turn asked Bro. Zollo to meet with Paul Cheli, a member of the Franklin Town Council and a neighbor of the to-be-constructed chapel. Mike Doherty made the introduction. In time, at a Planning Board meeting, Cheli stated “he was wholeheartedly in favor of the project and that every citizen in Franklin should welcome the organization with open arms.”
 — SHANNON ZOLLO, HIGH COUNCILMAN RESPONSIBLE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS, HINGHAM, MA

6. *Los Angeles, California* - Public Affairs representatives Keith Atkinson and LeAnne Hull met Reverend Cecil Chip Murray of the First AME (African Methodist Episcopal) Church over 20 years ago when both were being recognized for their work against pornography. Because of their friendship, when the Church wanted to build a chapel in South Central L.A., Reverend Murray helped the Church gain an audience with Mayor Tom Bradley; a building permit was granted within two days.
 — LEANNE HULL, PUBLIC AFFAIRS, LOS ANGELES, CA

Conclusion

As we study Ammon’s experience, we come to understand that whether King Lamoni was converted or not, Ammon was successful. As Ammon “went about doing good,” as the Savior did (*see ACTS 10:38*), The Church of Jesus Christ became known for good, thus creating a climate where the Church could flourish. As he extended himself to civic leaders, participating with his neighbors in doing good, his community was willing to endorse, authorize, and defend the Church.

The magnificence of Ammon’s example is that *if* one happens (public affairs), the other (missionary work) will occur. As we extend ourselves, conversions, whether our goal or not, will inevitably follow.