

NEWS RELEASE

Student Shares the Gospel Online

PROVO, Utah—One question inspired a BYU student to create the Web site that became the Internet's leading answer to the question: "What do Mormons teach about garments?"

"I wrote the garment article in response to a question on Yahoo answers," said Rusty Curtis 24, a senior majoring in advertising major at BYU. "I wanted it to be thorough because for some reason nay-sayers love to pounce on that specific issue. In the past, you got all this anti-Mormon stuff online, but now with my site people can search and find out the full content on what the Church really believes."

Included in Rusty's blog are posts on many of the doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints including Christ's atonement, Joseph Smith and the role of the Holy Ghost in our lives.

The curiosity about Mormonism as a worldwide religion has brought more than 1,700 unique visitors from around the world to his blog since the beginning of December. People from Iraq, India, South Korea, Australia, Europe, Saudi Arabia, South America, Canada and the United States have visited his site. Curtis created his blog, TruthisRestored.blogspot.com, as a way to help other people learn more about the LDS church from a non-authoritative perspective.

LDS church leaders are encouraging members to share the gospel by the use of new media:

"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," said Elder M. Russell Ballard, of the Quorum of the Twelve, at Brigham Young University-Hawaii's graduation ceremony in December. "The emergence of new media is facilitating a worldwide conversation on almost every subject including religion. May I ask that you join the conversation by participating on the Internet, particularly the new media, to share the gospel and to explain in simple and clear terms the message of the restoration."

The More Good Foundation aligns itself with Ballard's counsel. They do this by creating web applications like LDS.net and other sites that empower members of the church to share their beliefs through the use of new media features, including blogs, forums, video, chat, networking, news sharing, photo galleries, e-cards and more. In the fall, the More Good Foundation approached the BYU ad lab and Communications Department--led by Kevin Kelly, Jeff Sheets, and team leader, Kevin Wunder--to help them in their efforts to create the sites and spread the word about the potential of online missionary work that they facilitate. Working for the ad lab at that time, Curtis was one of many active students assigned to this project with the More Good Foundation.

Since missionary work had always been a passion of his, he knew it was something he wanted to participate in. Apart from his project in the ad lab, Rusty began creating his own blog as an unofficial site addressing doctrines and practices found in the LDS church. He created a place on his blog for people to ask questions, and he responded with clear answers.

One particular woman who asked a lot of questions on his blog had previously been a Latter-day Saint. But her mother, a member of another faith, chased her out of the church. Over the years, this lady had been exposed to a lot of anti-Mormon literature and criticism from her mother and others. She asked Curtis about several of the topics that her mother had taught her about. One day he got a message from her saying how excited she was to go back to church with her family the following Sunday.

Curtis was obviously excited about this development in a seeker's life. Over the past few weeks, her husband and children have become interested in joining the LDS church too. She is attending meetings every week and recently received a calling.

"From hearing Rusty's stories it makes me realize how effective using new media can be," said Candland Johnson, 24, a music education major from Salt Lake City.

Curtis believes the use of new media to be an excellent way of finding for the full-time missionaries.

"Members tend to think if someone wants to find out more they can just go to the official Church site, but for a non-member they want to talk to someone who is real and not just put up by the Church, which they can think is controlling or brainwashing. They want to see something more real from someone who is a member, and that is what I go for. Be real," Curtis said.

Curtis is himself a convert, baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at the age of 15. He immediately began preparing for his mission by studying the gospel 3 to 8 hours a day. Even while on his mission to St. Louis he would get up an hour early every day to get extra studying in because he wanted to know everything about the LDS church.

"On my mission we ran into pastors all the time. It never bothered me to talk to them or other people," Curtis said.

While many are not as brave or confident in their ability to answer questions about the LDS church's beliefs, Curtis advised those who wish to share the gospel to remember that not being face-to-face can relieve a huge amount of edge.

"Many people have the desire to share the gospel, but they feel they don't have an outlet. This provides real opportunities to do missionary work," Curtis said. "Missionaries go and serve a two-year serving in a concentrated place now I can serve people all around the world."