



Community of Christ
Historic Sites Foundation

Experiencing Forgiveness and Reconciliation at the Historic Sites

Steve Smith, Foundation field representative from Flagstaff, Arizona, and current volunteer at Joseph Smith III's Liberty Hall

During the 2010 World Conference, Jim Ellis and I were among the volunteers at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois. We provided guide services while the regular staff was in Independence. I was thrilled to guide part of the Tahitian delegation. My great-uncle and great-aunt, Joseph and Emma Burton, had sailed the missionary boat, Evanelia, from San Francisco to Tahiti where they served as missionaries. My granddaughter is named after that boat.

We had a wonderful time guiding tours through Joseph and Emma Smith's homes and talking about the life of the church in Nauvoo. In the sanctuary on the second floor of the Red Brick Store we shared in worship, singing, and prayers. We exchanged Tahitian ritual greetings and shell leis. It was a special, warm, and loving time.

But later that day misfortune struck. When the Tahitians went to a store, a stock boy became concerned about these different-looking people who spoke little English. He unjustly accused a Tahitian of shoplifting and called the police. Eventually it became clear the allegations were unfounded. The police and store representatives apologized. But feelings had been hurt, damaging what had been a wonderful experience.

Later, however, there was a beautiful outcome. Jim had been invited to dinner with a local family. He learned their daughter was on duty at the store the night the Tahitians visited. She went home very upset. After learning what had happened, the girl's mother and a friend baked a bunch of cookies and took them to the Tahitians' motel. They told the Tahitians how sorry they were about the false accusation and gave the cookies as a reconciliation offering. With many hugs, the Tahitians accepted the apology and cookies. In return they gave leis to the women.

But that wasn't all. The next morning the Tahitians returned to the store and presented leis to the staff. They sought the stock boy who had made the allegation and brought leis to him. They did not want him to lose his job over the incident.

Their actions were a wonderful testimony of the living reality of the gospel message among the Tahitian members of Community of Christ. They extended forgiveness and reconciliation. And they demonstrated the love and peace of Christ by reaching out to those who had offended them. As Christ said in John 13:35 (NRSV): "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."