

Robert L. Lively Jr. *The Mormon Missionary:
Who IS That Knocking at My Door?*

Wilton, Maine: By the Author, 2015.

Reviewed by Tim Zeidner

Robert L. Lively Jr. is dean emeritus at the University of Maine at Farmington. While not a member of the LDS Church, he has interviewed over 275 missionaries, mission presidents, various Church leaders (including President Hinckley), and other key figures involved in the missionary work of the LDS Church. He has visited the Provo Missionary Training Center and observed classroom instruction. Lively is a student of missionaries and of their desires to serve and bless others through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The genesis of this book comes from an experience years ago in a class that Lively taught, exposing his students to various religions by inviting adherents of those religions to come and explain their beliefs. When he suggested that the Mormons be invited, his students balked. Most had had some type of experience with Mormons and preferred not to revisit it. Lively persevered, and the Mormons became the favorite presenting group. As these experiences mounted, Lively realized that no one had ever written, from an outsider's perspective, why members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints serve missions.

As a result, this may be the most exhaustive effort by any author in providing insights into the various aspects of what missionary work is really about. It touches on the expectations to serve; training in the MTC; early service in the field; core prospects of finding, teaching, and baptizing; international service; sister missionaries and senior missionaries; returning home and next steps, including, for some, a decision to leave the Church, in part because of their experiences as a missionary.

Nearly all, if not all, other books that treat missionary work are either designed to instruct how to have successful, spiritual missions or are histories of missionary work and labor in different time periods. Lively's book, because it comes from an outside perspective, offers a candid and

unvarnished look at the experiences of missionaries largely in their own voices. The book is half autobiographies, since it is largely composed of missionaries' accounts, in their own words, about different aspects of their service. The candor and experiences shared cannot be found anywhere else. Because it does not rely on the teachings of Church leaders or experts about the vision and goals of missionary work, the book presents an authentic voice of how missionaries think and feel about their training and service. Consequently, this book speaks with a unique authority.

The Mormon Missionary should appeal to anyone interested in taking a deep and enriching dive into the minds and hearts of missionaries, sharing their reasons for service, their experiences in their service, and how that informs their lives during and after their mission experience. Because it is written by someone not of the LDS faith, it should appeal readily to others who are not of the faith but who want to understand why Mormon missionaries do what they do. For those who are of the LDS faith, this book offers a rare glimpse into a diverse collection of missionaries talking candidly about why they serve and the experiences they are having.

Tim Zeidner is Director of Research and Evaluation and adjunct teacher of Missionary Preparation at the Provo Missionary Training Center.