

Bishop Roberto de Jesus Melara

I was born on October 30, 1943, in San Salvador, Central America. My parents are Eulalio de Jesus Melara and Maria Santos de Melara. I graduated as a public accountant from Escuela Nacional de Comercio and studied economics in the National University. In El Salvador, I worked as an accountant for different companies. I have also worked as an auditor and held other managerial positions, even as the vice president of a company.

I married Eva Portillo Melendez on the 24th day of March in 1972. We have five children, Our eldest, Eva Maria, is twenty years old and is a B.Y.U. student. Next in line is Roberto Jr. who is eighteen years old and has also become a B.Y.U. student. Juan Roberto is now thirteen years old and is in junior high along with his eleven year old brother, Bobby. Last, but definitely not least is our eight year old "baby," Alanna. (Everyone expected our baby to be a boy, so my wife and I had gone through all of the boy's names in baby books and picked the perfect one - - Alan. Heavenly Father had other plans, and we were blessed with a beautiful baby girl - - Alanna!)

My first contact with the Church was in 1974. My little princess was just nine months old and her proud daddy was teaching her to walk. I don't know how many times I walked that sidewalk with her tiny hand in mine. It was definitely one of the most memorable moments of my life. One day was especially memorable. It was the day that changed my life. My princess and I were going through our daily walking exercises in front of our home when two young men walked by and praised my child. "What a beautiful girl you have," said the two young men. After that I was willing to listen to anything.

They presented themselves as representatives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and said that they had a message for me. They asked me if they could set up an appointment. Religion? Wait a minute, no one had mentioned religion. Immediately I responded, "If you believe in the Bible, come in. If not, then I'm sorry, but we will not be able to talk because my wife is an Evangelist."

That's how it all began. The missionaries came and shared the discussions. When the baptism invitation was extended I was ready to accept, but my wife was not. She had her own plans for my religious future. It was her goal to have me become a preacher for her church, so my plans for baptism were not very welcome. Her religion had taught her the power of prayer, so she knew God would hear her concern. She prayed incessantly that I would not be baptized and be led astray into a religion where she would have to accept other women as my wives. This is one of the things she had heard regarding the "Mormons," and she was very concerned.

The missionaries were very optimistic and saw this as a perfect teaching opportunity. Elder Jim S. Adams and Elder David A. Gunther challenged my wife to ask God, the Eternal Father, with a sincere heart, with real intent if these things were true. She received a precious revelation regarding the truthfulness of the gospel. We were baptized on July 19, 1974, by Elder Gunther and Elder Morris Glen Huber. It was a beautiful Salvadorian winter day that I shall never forget.

Three months later, I was ordained an elder by Bishop Alfonso O. Diaz. The day was October 17, 1974. Soon after, I was called to be the secretary for the Mejicanos Branch in El Salvador. In 1976, I was called to be elder's quorum president. From 1977 to 1978 I was executive secretary of the Cuscatlan Stake.

On the seventh day of January, 1978, my family was sealed for time and all eternity in the Mesa Arizona Temple. The next year, on the third of June, I was made a high priest by Franklin Henriquez and called to be bishop of the Mejicanos Ward. I was bishop until the seventh day of March 1980, at which time I was called to be stake president of the Cuscatlan Stake, in El Salvador. I was released the following year, on March 15, 1981, because by that time our family was living in Los Angeles, California.

That January, we had come on our yearly temple trip to the Arizona Temple. On this occasion I had the opportunity to be sealed to my parents as part of an eternal family. I was full of emotion for I had worked for so long preaching to them so that they would be baptized and prepare themselves to enter the House of the Lord.

On the way back to El Salvador, we were all extremely happy and full of emotion. Then the van I was driving broke down on the freeway. This forced us to stay a few days longer to try to get our van fixed, but we were unable to.

It was very saddening to think of staying in the United States. In our country we had enjoyed a very comfortable economic position, here we would have to start all over. Our home and car were completely paid for. We had also heard horrors regarding the jobs that were available for Hispanics. We were told that the jobs were in fast food restaurants and working for minimum wages. With a family like ours, that would not be enough. Finally, after heeding the counsel of some of our leaders, we decided to stay.

I sold the van for three airline tickets to El Salvador. These were for my parents and me. My wife remained here with our three children.

Before we had left El Salvador, my wife shared with me an impression that she had felt something inside her tell her, "You will not be able to return with your children, El Salvador shall be in flames." For this reason, she had bought a small suitcase and brought with her all of our important documents.

Soon after I arrived in El Salvador, I called my wife and told her that I would try to sell as many of our possessions as time permitted and return as soon as possible. War and threats on my life were inescapable. The other two brothers who had been stake presidents before me were both in exile for these same reasons, and I was next in line. I returned to Los Angeles with the conviction that our Heavenly Father's will was that we remain there for some time. The United States government granted us temporary residency, which was later permanent, and our life in this country began.

I was soon blessed with opportunities to serve. In 1981, I was called to be ward clerk for the Montebello, California Ward. In 1982, I was called to be a counselor in the bishopric.

On October 9, 1983, I was called to be the bishop of the Montebello Spanish Ward. I served in this calling until the 30th of June, 1985.

We were happy in Los Angeles, but I was very concerned. My daughter would come home and tell me horror stories about her third grade friends in school. Already she was being confronted with drugs and violence. I wanted a better environment for my family. Some of our friends had recently moved to Fontana and suggested that we visit.

From the time we first came to Fontana we knew it was our Heavenly Father's will that we move. We were blessed in every way. All we had were hopes and prayers. We acquired a house on our first visit to Fontana, and we knew God would provide for us. We moved to Fontana on June 1, 1985.

I was called to be the ward clerk in 1985. At that time, I attended a priesthood conference at the stake. It was announced that all of the brethren who had at some time served as stake presidents would please be seated on the stand. I was the only Lamanite in that group, and a brother approached me and asked, "Brother, where did you serve as stake president?" I answered, "In Central America." He told me, "My son served a mission there -- in a place called El Salvador." "What is your son's name?" He answered, "Jim S. Adams." With great joy I answered, "Elder Adams! Yes, your son was the one who taught us the gospel. He didn't baptize us because he was transferred to Guatemala, but he left us ready for baptism." We continued to talk. He gave me his card - - Fred Adams, and we departed.

In time, I was interviewed to be the bishop of the Fontana Fourth Ward. During the interview my wife asked President Devereaux if she could invite Brother Jim Adams to attend our ward the day I would be called as bishop. President Devereaux said yes. She was very excited. She called Brother Adams on the telephone and identified herself. So many years had passed, almost thirteen years.

That Sunday, on February 8, 1987, we waited for Brother Adams at the door of the chapel, but he neither entered our ward nor his. At that time both our wards shared the same building in Rialto on Willow. We often saw our dear missionary, but he always appeared very busy because at that time he was serving as a counselor in the bishopric. We felt sad and somewhat embarrassed and decided we would not introduce ourselves. I told my wife, "Perhaps you spoke too fast on the phone in Spanish and thirteen years of not practicing a language: Well, perhaps he's forgotten some words." Months passed, and we saw him each Sunday, but we never spoke. Soon after, both our wards were transferred to the Bloomington building on Randall.

One day as we walked through the chapel hallways, we saw him. He was leaning against the wall. His leg was in a cast, and he appeared very tired. He was probably in pain. I approached him and said in English, "How are you Brother Adams?" He said, "Fine." I asked him, "Do you know me?" He said, "Yes, you are the bishop of the Fontana Fourth Ward." I said, "Yes, I am Roberto Melara, and thanks to my Heavenly Father and you, I am a bishop. You taught us the gospel in El Salvador." I proceeded then to introduce my

family. He was very surprised. I think that if that day he was feeling pain and fatigue, perhaps his day had been made a little brighter by seeing a family he had taught so many years ago. Soon after the Fontana Fourth Ward was transferred to the Arrow building, and since that time we have never again seen our beloved missionary.

But the story continues. My little princess that I was teaching to walk on the Salvadorian sidewalk when the Elders (Gunther and Adams) walked by and said, "What a beautiful girl you have." and presented themselves -- well, she has grown. That little princess is now 21 years old. She has left B.Y.U. for a while, returning home to earn enough money to go on a full time mission. She is now waiting for her call, and we have been thinking that for her sacrament farewell, we will invite our dear missionary to share his testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I don't see the possibility of Elder Adams saving himself from speaking at a Melara missionary farewell, for:

-Evita currently awaits her call.

-Roberto Jr. will be leaving on a mission in about three months.

-Juan Roberto will begin seminary this fall and Bobby and Alanna, though still young, also have "goals."

The Melara family thanks our Heavenly Father for our beloved Brother and Savior Jesus Christ, for Jim S. Adams, David Gunther, and Morris Glen Huber, and for all those young men and women who place themselves in the service of our Heavenly Father, to teach the way that leads back to the Father.