



2022 | 96 minutes | Finland, Germany | English & Finnish with English subtitles

World Premiere - Sundance Film Festival 2022

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LOGLINE

THE MISSION reveals the inner lives of a group of young missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as they leave their homes for the first time and travel to the other side of the world in an attempt to convert some of Europe's most nonreligious, private and skeptical people, the Finns, to their faith.

SYNOPSIS

Every year, over 60,000 young missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are sent across the world to preach their gospel. Sundance Film Festival selection THE MISSION follows four Latter-day Saints teenagers from their training in Utah to their missions in Finland, home of Europe's most private and secular people. Tania Anderson's film tracks these wide-eyed, impassioned teens on their two-year rite of passage, as they struggle with being immersed in a new culture, and the daily rejections they inevitably receive throughout their task. Granted total access by the Church, THE MISSION is a sensitive observational documentary detailing the challenges and triumphs of these missionaries' journeys.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The Mission marks the first time in its history that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has allowed a non-LDS film crew to film young missionaries over the course of their entire mission – from their nervous goodbyes as they leave home (some for the very first time) until their return as triumphant conquistadors with a “missionary glow” or as psychologically worn-out fallen heroes. What happens to these young people on their two-year mission? How do these teens carry the weight of their Church’s – and their souls’ – assured future upon their shoulders, while dealing with daily rejection in a modern, increasingly atheistic world?

My aim with this film was to connect with the vulnerable teenager behind the religious suit, the human being behind the missionary. Shot in *cinéma vérité* style, I wanted audience to be at eye-level with the missionaries, which is sometimes uncomfortably close. The intimacy of the film allows us to capture how young LDS missionaries see and experience everyday life, and gain insight into the well-oiled institution that runs and supports the dispatch of tens of thousands of young people to the four corners of the planet to be of service to locals and share their holy text, the Book of Mormon.

At the core of the filmmaking process – from planning to post-production – we strived to maintain the principle of “standing on equal ground” with the cast, as well as with all the people behind the scenes. The crew went into this project with a child-like curiosity, to discover and communicate what it’s like to be walking around in a pair of well-shined leather shoes and a holy mission upon one’s shoulders; to simply provide a space for these ordinary youngsters to be seen and heard, as they are.

The idea for this film came from a chance encounter in 2016. I was taking a walk in Finland’s cold and pitch-black November, pushing my infant son in his buggy. I happened to pass two young men speaking English. I immediately recognized their suits and aimed to press on before they saw me and made a move. But they were deep in conversation with one another as they cautioned about “temptation being everywhere.” Having happened upon this conversation, I became privy to a more vulnerable side of LDS missionaries that I had never seen before. For the first time, I could see beyond the attire that so clearly marks them as representatives of their church. At that moment I caught a glance at two unique 18-year-olds with high hopes, and deep fears, trying to keep out the cold and mundanity of everyday life – no different from myself (apart from our age, of course). From there my curiosity about missionaries and the nature of their mission grew: Where do missionaries hang out when they’re not on the street? Do they ever take breaks? What do they talk about when they’re not talking to passers-by about the Book of Mormon? How do they experience ordinary Finnish life? What makes them tick?

And thus began the feature documentary concept that led, about a year later, to an 18-month process of gaining access to LDS missionaries, by first initiating talks with the Church's authorities in Finland, with the local Mission President, and onto talks with the Missionary Department at the Church's headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah. The next group of missionaries heading to Finland was "revealed" in late winter 2019, after which the Church approached them with the film idea. After talking to all the young people from this new group, we ended up choosing four protagonists whose backgrounds and personalities complemented one another's in such a way that would allow us to tell different sides of the missionary's journey.

The concept of "being a missionary" has several storytelling appeals. One is the fact that this kind of religious mission traces the classical Western hero's tale, dating back to ancient Greek mythology, whereby the hero leaves their home, faces life and returns home a changed person. Another appeal for me as a filmmaker is the sheer scarcity of missionaries nowadays. The LDS Church is one of the few religions that has such a proactive missionary program, with the smart suits of the male youths of the program recognizable all over the world. In fact, the missionary program is very much a part of the religion's own legend, so to speak, as Samuel Smith, brother of the Church's founder Joseph Smith, is regarded as the church's first full-time missionary. The first overseas mission was launched in 1837 and today, through a fairly complex system that is part divine revelation, part peer pressure and part voluntary, nearly 60,000 missionaries, most of whom are new high school graduates, are sent out annually to the four corners of the earth to recruit new members to their faith.

In spite of their recognizable attire, LDS missionaries seem to largely go by unnoticed. I think society teaches us to ignore them, at best, and be wary of them, at worst. Such avoidance or lack of curiosity seems to lead to making generalizations and assumptions about who they are, why they're here etc. And we walk around with this attitude of "I know everything I need to know about them – I don't need to know any more." In a sense, we isolate ourselves from them, or them from us. And in all of this lack of curiosity/avoidance/isolation fear is bred. And this attitude or general disposition towards others is not only applicable to LDS missionaries, but to all sorts of groups of people that populate our urban landscapes – from the homeless to Wall Street traders. So, in a sense, with this film, I'm hoping to reduce the fear, the automatic wariness we have of others. It doesn't mean we have to convert or even agree; we just don't need to fear. Because when we scratch the surface, we usually discover much more commonality than not.

MISSIONARY PROGRAM

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' missionary program is one of its most recognized characteristics. LDS missionaries can be seen on the streets of hundreds of major cities in the world as well as in thousands of smaller communities.

The missionary effort is based on the New Testament pattern of missionaries serving in pairs, teaching the gospel and baptizing believers in the name of Jesus Christ

More than 60,000 full-time missionaries are serving missions for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Most missionaries are young people under the age of 25, serving in over 400 missions throughout the world.

Missionaries work with a companion of the same gender during their mission, with the exception of couples, who work with their spouse. Single men serve missions for two years and single women serve missions for 18 months.

Missionaries receive their assignment from Church headquarters and are sent only to countries where governments allow the Church to operate. Missionaries do not request their area of assignment and do not know beforehand whether they will be required to learn a language.



Prior to going to their assigned area, missionaries spend a short period of time at one of ten missionary training centers throughout the world. There they learn how to teach the gospel in an orderly and clear way and, if necessary, they begin to learn the language of the people they will be teaching. The largest training center is in Provo, Utah, with additional centers in Brazil, Colombia, England, Ghana, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, the Philippines, and South Africa.

Male missionaries are addressed with the title “Elder” and women are addressed with the title “Sister.”

A typical missionary day begins by waking at 6:30 a.m. for personal study. The day is spent proselytizing by following up on appointments, visiting homes or meeting people in the street or other public places. Missionaries end their day by 10:30 p.m.

In some parts of the world, missionaries are sent only to serve humanitarian or other specialized missions. Those missionaries do not proselytize.

Missionary work is voluntary. Missionaries fund their own missions – except for their transportation to and from their field of labor – and are not paid for their services.

Missionaries avoid entertainment, parties or other activities common to this age-group as long as they are on their missions, so they can focus entirely on the work of serving and of teaching others the LDS gospel.



FILMMAKER BIOS

Tania Anderson – Director & Writer

Tania Anderson is a British, American and Swiss emerging filmmaker, based in Helsinki, Finland. She has also worked as a writer and journalist with over 10 years of experience of working in the media, most recently as a writer for National Geographic, where she discovered her passion for telling ordinary people's extraordinary stories. A conversation she accidentally overheard between two young missionaries in dark, wintery Finland sparked the idea for *The Mission*, which is also her first feature-length documentary film.

Isabella Karhu and Juho-Pekka Tanskanen – Producers

Danish Bear Productions is a Finnish film production company that was founded by award-winning filmmakers Isabella Karhu and Juho-Pekka Tanskanen in 2015. The company specializes in producing artistically and high-production quality creative films and their work has been screened in film festivals around the world. Their previous feature-length documentary, *Waiting for Barcelona*, had its world premiere at CPH:DOX in 2018, was nominated for the Finnish National Film Award for Best Documentary in 2019, and is currently on Netflix throughout Europe.

Dirk Manthey – Co-Producer

Dirk Manthey Film was founded in 2000 by Dirk Manthey and is based in Hamburg, Germany. The company focuses on the development and production of national and international documentaries that have a social as well as artistic relevance. Their ambition is to tell stories that touch the audience on a deeper level and reach beyond the screen. The strong presence of their films at renowned German and international film festivals, and their great resonance, is proof of the great demand for films with a strong voice and attitude of their own.

Antti Savolainen – Cinematographer

Antti Savolainen is a Finnish cinematographer who has worked on various projects ranging from short fiction films to music videos, from mid-length documentaries to documentary television series. *The Mission* marks debut working in the feature-length documentary -format. He is currently filming a feature documentary titled *Knockout*, which is being produced by Danish Bear Productions.

Suvi Solja – Editor

Suvi Solja is a Finnish editor who has mainly specialized in documentaries and documentary series. She has also edited one feature-length fiction film, and has worked as an editor on *Waiting for Barcelona* (2018), a feature-length documentary produced by Danish Bear Productions, which premiered in CPH:DOX and was nominated for the prestigious Finnish National Film Award for Best Documentary of the Year in 2019.

Janis Grossmann-Alhambra – Sound Designer

Janis Grossmann-Alhambra is a sound designer and mixing engineer based in Hamburg, Germany, who is passionate about documentaries and arthouse films. Films featuring his sound designs and mixes have been shown at various international festivals like IDFA, Cannes, Berlinale, Sevilla, and Sydney.

Mikko Joensuu – Composer

Mikko Joensuu is a Finnish composer, writer and musician. He is best known for his *Amen* trilogy, a series of albums that dives into the subject of faith and spirituality. *The Mission* is his first film score composition.

FEATURING

Elder Tyler Davis
Sister McKenna Field
Elder Kaii Pauole
Sister Megan Bills

MAIN CREDITS

Director & Writer

Tania Anderson

Cinematographer

Antti Savolainen

Editor

Suvi Solja

Sound Designers

Janis Grossmann-Alhambra
Isa Köroglu

Composer

Mikko Joensuu

Producers

Isabella Karhu
Juho-Pekka Tanskanen
(Danish Bear Productions)

Co-producer

Dirk Manthey
(Dirk Manthey Film)



ABOUT FILM MOVEMENT

Founded in 2002, Film Movement is a North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films based in New York City. It has released more than 250 feature films and shorts culled from prestigious film festivals worldwide. Its catalog includes titles by directors such as Hirokazu Kore-eda, Maren Ade, Jessica Hausner, Andrei Konchalovsky, Andrzej Wajda, Diane Kurys, Ciro Guerra and Melanie Laurent. In 2015, Film Movement launched its reissue label Film Movement Classics, featuring new restorations released theatrically as well as on Blu-ray and DVD, including films by such noted directors as Eric Rohmer, Peter Greenaway, Bille August, Marleen Gorris, Takeshi Kitano, Arturo Ripstein, Sergio Corbucci and Ettore Scola.

For more information, visit www.filmmovement.com.



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