

A Brief History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Louisiana



EARLY CHURCH HISTORY IN LOUISIANA

The history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Louisiana dates back to 1841, when the First Presidency of the Church declared that New Orleans was the port of entry for members of the Church immigrating from foreign countries. Between 1841 and 1855, more than 17,400 saints immigrated through New Orleans, traveled up the Mississippi River, and then continued on their journey west. Though a branch of the Church was organized in New Orleans in 1844, it was later discontinued as the Latter-day Saints moved westward to Utah.

After the Church was headquartered in Utah, missionaries were sent back to Louisiana to preach the gospel. On October 28, 1895, in what was called the Southern States Mission of the Church, six missionaries were sent to New Orleans, Franklinton and Amite. Two years later, in the spring of 1897, missionaries were sent to Baton Rouge to preach the gospel.

From those early beginnings, the Church continued to grow in Louisiana. The first stake (a geographical grouping of multiple congregations, comparable to a diocese) in Louisiana was created in New Orleans on June 19, 1955, and another in Baton Rouge on January 26, 1969. Other stakes in other cities followed. As of 2019, Louisiana now has 7 stakes, 55 congregations and 29,723 Church members.

THE CHURCH IN THE COMMUNITY TODAY

In Louisiana, Latter-day Saints take an active role in the community, especially when natural disasters hit. Following Hurricane Katrina, Latter-day Saint Charities provided over

four million pounds of food and water and over 1,152,000 hours of volunteer labor to help the people of New Orleans clean out their homes and businesses. Thousands of Helping Hands volunteers from across the southern states have assisted Louisiana residents after Hurricanes Katrina (2005), Ike (2008), Gustav (2008), Isaac (2012), Harvey (2017) and Michael (2018). More than 13,000 volunteers from 10 states provided over 108,249 hours of labor and over 20 truckloads of goods to help homeowners, food banks, churches and businesses recover from the flooding in Baton Rouge and Denham Springs.

A REFUGE FROM THE STORM

As Church membership continued to grow in the deep South, members who wished to worship in the temple traveled great distances to the temples in Dallas or Atlanta. These members prayed for the day a temple would be built that was closer to their homes so they could attend more frequently. Their faith and prayers were answered when the Baton Rouge Louisiana Temple was announced in 1998. The groundbreaking took place May 8, 1999, and the temple was dedicated July 16, 2000, by then-Church President Gordon B. Hinckley. More than 18,000 people attended the public open house.

Many refer to the temple as a house of refuge. This description was literally tested within five years of the dedication of the Baton Rouge Louisiana Temple when the area was hit by Hurricane Katrina, a category five hurricane that destroyed the Gulf Coast of both Louisiana and Mississippi with a death toll of 1,836. Latter-day Saints from all over the country responded to community needs, donating 17,400 days of service. A local bishop's storehouse was used as a command center for relief efforts.

REDEDICATION

After 18 years of continuous operation, the Baton Rouge Louisiana Temple closed for renovations on January 28, 2018. During the closure, local Church members traveled to temples in neighboring states. As a culmination of the renovation efforts, the temple will be rededicated on November 17, 2019. Following the rededication, the Baton Rouge Louisiana Temple will serve Latter-day Saints in Louisiana, Mississippi, and a small portion of Arkansas.

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS