

# Overview of the History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in South Africa



**THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS IN SOUTH AFRICA** can be traced back to the 1850s, when the first congregation was established in Mowbray, Cape Town. Missionaries from Utah began preaching around Cape Town in April 1853. By 1855, 176 converts had joined the Church, and six congregations were formed. Many of these new Church members decided to emigrate to North America, as was common practice at the time, and missionary work ceased in the late 1800s. A few converts remained in South Africa when missionaries eventually returned in 1903.

In the early twentieth century, the Church grew slowly but steadily. Congregations were established throughout the country. Local Latter-day Saints and missionaries built and dedicated the Church's first two meetinghouses in South Africa in Johannesburg in 1925 and Cape Town in 1933. In 1927, the Church's South African Mission also began publishing a periodical that was eventually called Cumorah's Southern Messenger. It was regularly published until 1970.

At the time, the Church was established mostly among white South Africans. The institution of apartheid and the Church's restriction on granting the priesthood to people of African descent limited interaction between white and black South Africans. However, the South African Mission made efforts to reach out. In the 1920s and 1930s, a small black and Indian congregation emerged in Cape Town. In the 1960s, the Book of Mormon came into the hands of several people in Soweto who believed its teachings.

Church membership grew in the mid-twentieth century. Local Latter-day Saints and missionaries raised funds and built new meetinghouses beginning in the 1950s. This led to the dedication of the Church's first meetinghouses in Port Elizabeth and Durban in 1958, Bloemfontein in 1961, and Pietermaritzburg and East London in 1968. On 22 March 1970, the Church's first stake (an organization that supervises a group of congregations) in South Africa was organized, with headquarters in Johannesburg. In the coming years additional stakes were formed throughout the country, including Durban in 1981.

In 1978, Church President Spencer W. Kimball received a revelation confirming that the priesthood could be given to black men. Despite apartheid, the Church's first racially integrated congregations were soon established in the 1980s. Young black South Africans also began serving in leadership positions and volunteered to become missionaries. The first known Zulu missionary was called to serve a mission in England in 1984.

The Church's first temple in South Africa was dedicated in Johannesburg by President Gordon B. Hinckley, a counselor in the Church's First Presidency, in August 1985. Plans for the temple had been announced in 1981, and construction began the next year. Prior to the opening of the Johannesburg Temple, the few Latter-day Saints who could afford to do so travelled to temples in England and the United States. In the years since the temple's opening, Latter-day Saints from across Africa have come to Johannesburg to receive temple ordinances.

In 1992, the growth of the Church in South Africa prompted leaders to organize a second mission in South Africa, headquartered in Durban. The Church also continued efforts to translate the Book of Mormon and other literature into multiple languages. Previously, the Book of Mormon had been translated from English into Afrikaans in 1972. A partial Zulu translation was published in 1987. Eventually, the Book of Mormon was fully published in Xhosa in 2000 and in Zulu and Twana in 2003. The same year, the Church opened a missionary training center in Johannesburg.

In October 2011, Church President Thomas S. Monson announced plans to build a second temple in South Africa, in Durban. Construction of the temple began with a groundbreaking ceremony held on 6 April 2016.

THE CHURCH OF  
**JESUS CHRIST**  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS