

History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Phoenix, Arizona

Mormon pioneers first settled near Mesa in 1877, but it wasn't until 1912 that the first official Church meeting took place, when a group of nine members gathered for the first time in a room above Donofrio's Confectionery in Phoenix. The small congregation continued to meet in various places, including a laundry shop and over a bicycle shop, until the first Church building was constructed in 1918. It was located at Seventh Street and Monroe and was built at a cost of \$18,000. Two hundred ninety-eight members attended the dedication of the building, where J. Robert Price was called as the first [bishop](#) (the leader of a congregation).

By 1927 membership of the Church had grown in the Salt River Valley to the point where a temple, the first in the state, was constructed in Mesa. The Mesa Arizona Temple is still in operation today and anchors a historic district, which has predominantly retained its residential character.

The Church has a legacy of humanitarian service in Arizona. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, many businesses experienced great financial stress, and many failed. Good Samaritan Hospital, one of two Phoenix hospitals, did not escape this fate. Hospital superintendent J. O. Sexson needed \$75,000 to keep the hospital open and turned to the Church for the needed funds. He subsequently traveled to Utah and met with senior Church leaders, including President Heber J. Grant, who said, "Mr. Sexson, you have a very worthy cause, but we don't loan money. We are not a bank. But we have a large membership in your Salt River Valley and we have heard good things about your hospital. We have decided to give you the funds you are in need of, and with it our blessings for your continued excellent service to your community." With this donation, Mr. Sexson was able to see the hospital through the trials of the Depression and keep the school of nursing operating.

This collaborative spirit with the community and other faiths helped the Church flourish in Arizona. Today membership has grown to over 388,000, representing nearly one in every 17 citizens in the state. There are more than 800 local congregations, called wards or branches, and 90 [stakes](#) (similar to a diocese).

A thriving membership has also led to the construction of additional temples, which are considered the most sacred places on earth to members of the Church. Once dedicated, the Phoenix Temple will be the fifth temple in Arizona and the 144th operating temple of the Church worldwide.

When ground was broken for the Phoenix Arizona Temple in June 2011, Elder [Ronald A. Rasband](#) of the [Presidency of the Seventy](#) said the new building would be a "beautiful and magnificent temple" that will bless both Mormons and the Phoenix community. It is that sense of community that will continue to lead to a bright future for the Church in Arizona.