



Latter-day Saints from around the world rejoice in the blessings of the gospel.

The Worldwide Church

President Joseph Fielding Smith

When David O. McKay died, President Joseph Fielding Smith, then nearly 93 years of age, became President of the Church. He was the son of former Church President Joseph F. Smith.

As a boy, Joseph Fielding Smith desired to learn the will of the Lord, which prompted him to read the Book of Mormon twice before he was ten years old and to carry the scriptures with him when he walked. When the ball team missed him, they usually found him in the hayloft reading the scriptures. He later said, "From my earliest recollection, from the time I first could read, I have received more pleasure and greater satisfaction out of the study of the scriptures, and reading of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the work that has been accomplished for the salvation of men, than from anything else in all the world."¹

This early study laid the foundation for an extensive knowledge of the scriptures and Church history, which he drew upon in sermons and in the writing of almost two dozen books and scores of important articles on doctrinal subjects.

During his administration, the first stakes were organized in Asia (Tokyo, Japan) and in Africa (Johannesburg, South Africa). With the growth in Church membership, President Smith and his Counselors began the practice of holding area conferences throughout the world to train local leaders and allow members to meet General Authorities. The first such conference was held in Manchester, England. In order to better serve people throughout the world, health care missionaries were called to teach basic



The first area conference of the Church was held in England in August 1971 under the direction of President Joseph Fielding Smith. Elder Howard W. Hunter is at the podium.

health principles and sanitation. Soon more than 200 health missionaries were serving in many countries.

Since 1912, the Church had sponsored seminary classes in buildings adjacent to high schools in the western United States. In the 1920s, institutes of religion were begun at colleges and universities attended by large numbers of Latter-day Saints. In the early 1950s, early morning seminary classes were started in the Los Angeles, California, area, and soon more than 1,800 students were attending. Nonmember observers were surprised that 15- to 18-year-old Latter-day Saint youth would arise at 5:30 A.M. five days a week to attend religious study classes. In the early 1970s, the home study seminary program was introduced so that Latter-day Saint students throughout the world could receive religious instruction. During President Smith's administration, seminary and institute enrollment grew dramatically.

In President Smith's last public address, given at the April 1972 general conference, he said: "There is no cure for the ills of the world except the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our hope for peace, for temporal and spiritual prosperity, and for an eventual inheritance in the kingdom of God is found only in and through the restored gospel. There is no work that any of us can engage in that is as important as preaching the gospel and building up the Church and kingdom of God on earth."²

After serving as Church President for two and one-half years, Joseph Fielding Smith passed quietly away in the home of his daughter. He had reached the age of 95 and had served the Lord valiantly throughout his life.

President Harold B. Lee

On the day after President Joseph Fielding Smith died, the family of President Harold B. Lee, the senior member of the Quorum of the Twelve, gathered for a home evening. One family member asked what they could do that would help President Lee the most. "Be true to the faith; just live the gospel as I have taught you," he answered. That message applies to all Church members. In his first press conference as Church President, Harold B. Lee declared: "Keep the commandments of God. Therein will be the salvation of individuals and nations during these troublesome times."³

When Harold B. Lee became Church President on 7 July 1972, he was 73 years old, the youngest Apostle to become President since Heber J. Grant. He had played a major role in Church administration since 1935, when he was called to direct the Church welfare program (see page 109). He had also played a major role in the review of the Church's programs and curriculum materials that led to the simplification and correlation of Church programs. He was a man of deep spirituality who was quick to respond to the impressions he received from heaven.

President Lee and his Counselors presided over the second area conference, held in Mexico City. Church members assembled

at this conference were the first Latter-day Saints to sustain the new First Presidency. President Lee explained that the meetings were held in Mexico City to “give recognition and to commend the wonderful labors of the many who . . . have been instrumental in bringing about the tremendous growth of the Church.”

When the Saints in Mexico and Central America learned that an area conference would be held in Mexico City, many began making plans to attend. One sister went door-to-door asking for laundry. For five months she saved the pesos earned from scrubbing her neighbors’ clothes and was able to travel to the conference and attend all the sessions. Many Saints willingly fasted during the days of the conference because they did not have money to buy food after working and saving to attend the meetings. Those who made sacrifices were rewarded with great spiritual strength. One member declared that the conference was “the most beautiful experience of my life!” Another told a reporter, “It will take many years for us to forget the love that we have felt here these days.”⁴

During his administration, President Lee visited the Holy Land, the first Church President in this dispensation to do so. He also announced that smaller temples would now be constructed and would eventually dot the world.

On the day after Christmas in 1973, after having served as Church President for only 18 months, President Lee died. A spiritual giant had returned to his eternal home.

President Spencer W. Kimball

A man who knew much about pain and suffering, Spencer W. Kimball, the senior member of the Twelve, was sustained as President of the Church after President Lee died. Most of his vocal cords had been removed because of cancer, and he spoke in a quiet, husky voice that Latter-day Saints came to love. Known for his humility, his commitment, his ability to work, and his personal slogan, “Do It,” President Kimball thrust in his sickle with all his might.

Spencer W. Kimball's first address as President was to the Church's regional representatives, and it was memorable for everyone who attended. A participant in the meeting recalled that only moments after the talk began, "we became alert to an astonishing spiritual presence, and we realized that we were listening to something unusual, powerful, different. . . . It was as if he were drawing back the curtains which covered the purpose of the Almighty and inviting us to view with him the destiny of the gospel and the vision of its ministry."

President Kimball showed the leaders "how the Church was not fully living in the faithfulness that the Lord expects of His people, and that, to a certain degree, we had settled into a spirit of complacency and satisfaction with things as they were. It was at that moment that he sounded the now famous slogan, 'We must lengthen our stride.' " He admonished his audience to increase their commitment to proclaiming the gospel to the nations of the earth. He also called for a large increase in the number of missionaries who could serve in their own countries. At the conclusion of the sermon, President Ezra Taft Benson declared, "Truly, there is a prophet in Israel."⁵

Under President Kimball's dynamic leadership, many more members served full-time missions, and the Church moved forward throughout the world. In August 1977, President Kimball traveled to Warsaw, where he dedicated the land of Poland and blessed its people that the work of the Lord might go forward. Missionary training centers were established in Brazil, Chile, Mexico, New Zealand, and Japan. In June 1978 he announced a revelation from God that was to have a tremendous effect on missionary work worldwide. For many years the priesthood had been denied to persons of African descent, but now priesthood and temple blessings would be granted to all worthy male members.

This revelation had long been hoped for by faithful people throughout the world. One of the first black persons to accept the gospel in Africa was William Paul Daniels, who learned of the

Church as early as 1913. He traveled to Utah, where he received a special blessing from President Joseph F. Smith. President Smith promised him that if he remained faithful, he would hold the priesthood in this life or the next. Brother Daniels died in 1936, still a faithful member of the Church, and his daughter had the temple ordinances performed for her father soon after the 1978 revelation on the priesthood.⁶

Many more people in Africa developed testimonies of the truthfulness of the gospel through Church literature or through miraculous personal experiences, but they were not able to enjoy all the blessings of the gospel.

For many months before the June 1978 revelation, President Kimball discussed with his Counselors and the Twelve Apostles the denial of priesthood authority to persons of African descent. Church leaders were reluctant to open missions in areas of the world where the full blessings of the gospel could not be conferred upon worthy Church members. In an area conference in South Africa, President Kimball declared: "I prayed with much fervency. I knew that something was before us that was extremely important to many of the children of God. I knew that we could receive the revelations of the Lord only by being worthy and ready for them and ready to accept them and put them into place. Day after day I went alone and with great solemnity and seriousness in the upper rooms of the temple, and there I offered my soul and offered my efforts to go forward with the program. I wanted to do what he wanted. I talked about it to him and said, 'Lord, I want only what is right.'"⁷

In a special meeting in the temple with his Counselors and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, President Kimball asked that they all freely express their views about giving the priesthood to black males. Then they prayed around the altar with President Kimball as voice. Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who was there, later said, "On this occasion, because of the importuning and the faith, and because the hour and the time had arrived, the Lord in his providences poured out the Holy Ghost upon the First Presidency and

the Twelve in a miraculous and marvelous manner, beyond anything that any then present had ever experienced.”⁸ It was made clear to the leaders of the Church that the time had come for all worthy men to receive the full blessings of the priesthood.

The First Presidency sent a letter dated 8 June 1978 to priesthood leaders, explaining that the Lord had revealed that “all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color.” On 30 September 1978, the Saints in general conference voted unanimously to support the action of their leaders. This letter is now found in the Doctrine and Covenants as Official Declaration 2.

Since the time of this announcement, thousands of persons of African descent have come into the Church. The experience of one convert in Africa illustrates how the hand of the Lord has blessed these people. A college graduate and teacher had a dream in which he saw a large building with spires or towers, into which people dressed in white were entering. Later as he was traveling, he saw a Latter-day Saint chapel and felt impressed that this church was somehow connected with his dream, so he attended a Sunday service there. After the meetings, the mission president’s wife showed him a pamphlet. Opening it, the man saw a picture of the Salt Lake Temple, the building of his dream. Later he said: “Before I became aware I was weeping. . . . I can’t explain the feeling. I was released of all burdens. . . . I felt that I had gone to a place where I visited often. And now I was at home.”⁹

During President Kimball’s administration, the First Quorum of the Seventy was reorganized, the three-hour consolidated Sunday meeting schedule was put into place, and temples were built at a rapid pace. In 1982, 22 temples throughout the world were either in the planning stages or under construction, by far the most in the Church’s history to that time. Also, President Kimball established a demanding travel schedule that took him to many countries to hold area conferences. At these meetings, he ignored his own needs and scheduled every possible opportunity to meet with and strengthen and bless the local Saints.



In recent years, temples have been built in increasing numbers throughout the world. The Frankfurt Germany Temple is one of the many temples that now bless the lives of Church members.

In many countries, Church members yearned to receive the sacred ordinances of salvation offered in temples. Among these was a Latter-day Saint from Sweden who served many missions and labored in the mission presidency. When he died, he left a substantial part of his property to the Swedish temple fund, long before the Church announced that a temple would be constructed in that country. When President Kimball announced the temple, this man's contribution had accrued interest and become a large sum. Soon after the temple's dedication, this faithful brother, who was endowed while he lived, was sealed to his parents in the very temple his money had helped to build.

A father and mother in Singapore determined to take their family to the temple to be sealed and receive their temple blessings. They sacrificed many things to raise the necessary funds and were

finally able to make the trip and attend the temple. They stayed in the home of the missionary who had taught them years earlier. While visiting a grocery store, this sister became separated from her husband and the missionary. When they found her, she was holding a bottle of shampoo and weeping. She explained that one of the sacrifices she had made in order to attend the temple was to go without shampoo, which she had not used for seven years. Her sacrifices, while difficult to make, now seemed small, for she knew that her family was eternally bound together by the ordinances of the house of the Lord.

Another major development during President Kimball's administration occurred in 1979 when the Church published a new English-language edition of the King James Bible. The text was unchanged, but footnotes were added that cross-referenced the Bible with the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. A large Topical Guide and Bible Dictionary provided insights unique to modern-day scriptures. This edition had new headings for all chapters and also included excerpts from Joseph Smith's inspired revisions of the King James Bible.

In 1981 new editions of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price were also published. These included the new system of footnotes, new chapter and section headings, maps, and an index. At about this time, the Church also began to place increased emphasis on translating the latter-day scriptures into many other languages.

In his example and teachings, President Kimball inspired Church members to excellence in all their endeavors. At the celebration honoring the 100th anniversary of the founding of Brigham Young University, he said, "I am both hopeful and expectant that out of this University and the Church's Educational System there will rise brilliant stars in drama, literature, music, sculpture, painting, science, and in all the scholarly graces."¹⁰ On other occasions, he expressed his hope that Latter-day Saint artists would tell the story of the restored gospel in a powerful and persuasive manner.



President Spencer W. Kimball with Indians in the southwestern United States.

In spite of President Kimball's busy schedule, he constantly reached out to others in love and service. He had a special feeling for the Native American people in North and South America and the people of the Polynesian islands, and he spent many hours in various efforts to help them. He had received a blessing from President George Albert Smith instructing him to watch over them, and as President of the Church, he designated members of the Quorum of the Twelve to dedicate or rededicate the lands in Central and South America for the preaching of the gospel. Since that time, tens of thousands of people throughout Central and South America have rejoiced in the blessings of the gospel.

An incident that was typical of his concern for all people occurred in a crowded airport where a young mother, stranded by bad weather, stood in line after line with her two-year-old daughter, trying to get a flight to her destination. She was two months pregnant and under doctor's orders not to carry her young child, who was exhausted and hungry. No one offered to help, although several people made critical comments about her crying child. Then, the woman later reported:

"Someone came towards us and with a kindly smile said, 'Is there something I could do to help you?' With a grateful sigh I accepted his offer. He lifted my sobbing little daughter from the cold floor and lovingly held her to him while he patted her gently on the back. He asked if she could chew a piece of gum. When she was settled down, he carried her with him and said something kindly to the others in the line ahead of me, about how I needed their help. They seemed to agree and then he went up to the ticket counter [at the front of the line] and made arrangements with the clerk for me to be put on a flight leaving shortly. He walked with us to a bench, where we chatted a moment, until he was assured that I would be fine. He went on his way. About a week later I saw a picture of Apostle Spencer W. Kimball and recognized him as the stranger in the airport."¹¹

For some months before his death, President Kimball suffered with severe health problems, but he was always an example of patience, long-suffering, and diligence in the face of trial. He died on 5 November 1985, after serving as President of the Church for 12 years.