



The Philippines:

SPIRITUAL
STRENGTH
UPON THE
ISLES OF
THE SEA

In the short span of 53 years, the Church has experienced astounding strength and growth in the Philippines, known as the “Pearl of the Orient.”

To Augusto A. Lim, the message being presented by two young missionaries from the United States seemed to confirm principles he already knew were true. A young lawyer and a Christian, Augusto noted that doctrines such as continuing revelation were “things that even when I was in high school and college, I believed in.”¹

After several months, Augusto agreed to attend Sunday services and took the challenge to read and pray about the Book of Mormon. “I began to read the Book of Mormon seriously in the same spirit that Moroni advised us [to have]. When I did that with the desire to know if it’s true—after a few lines—I was gaining a testimony,” he recalled.²

In October of 1964, Augusto Lim was baptized and became a pioneer of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Philippines, with his wife and family joining shortly. Today, after decades of faithful service in the Church—which included a call in 1992 to serve as a General Authority, the first Filipino to serve in that position—Brother Lim reflects the faith and dedication of hundreds of thousands of Latter-day Saints living in the “Pearl of the Orient.”

A Fertile Land

About 550 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, the Lord promised the Book of Mormon prophet Nephi: “I

remember those who are upon the isles of the sea,” and “bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth” (2 Nephi 29:7). To many who have read these choice words, one group of “isles of the sea” comes to mind: the Philippines.

With a population approaching 100 million, the Republic of the Philippines is a large archipelago of about 7,100 islands located off the southeast coast of Asia. It is a beautiful tropical country populated by friendly, lively, and humble people. Yet the country is prone to earthquakes, typhoons, volcanic eruptions, tidal waves, and other natural disasters and suffers from a host of socioeconomic problems. Widespread poverty is a recurring challenge, and Filipinos have endured bouts of political instability and economic crisis.

But to those who are familiar with the Lord’s ways, the Philippines is fertile ground for the planting of gospel seeds. Along with Tagalog and other native languages, many Filipinos speak English, which is also a national language. Due to a long period of Spanish rule, more than 90 percent of the population is Christian; a significant portion of the minority is Muslim.

The first attempt to introduce the Church in the Philippines was made in 1898 during the Spanish-American War by Willard Call and George Seaman, Latter-day Saint



Building on gospel principles, young adults in the Philippines are achieving success and becoming sturdy leaders in the Lord's Church.

servicemen from Utah who had been set apart as missionaries prior to their departure. As opportunities arose, they preached the gospel, but no baptisms followed.

During World War II, several Latter-day Saints moved through the islands with advancing Allied forces. In 1944 and 1945, military groups held Church meetings in many locations, and numerous LDS service members and service workers were still in the Philippines when the war ended. Among them were Maxine Tate and recent convert Jerome Horowitz. Both helped introduce the gospel to Aniceta Fajardo. While helping rebuild Aniceta's house in a bombed-out area of Manila, Brother Horowitz shared his newly found faith with Aniceta and her daughter, Ruth.

Aniceta gained a testimony and desired baptism, but the Church did not authorize baptisms for Filipinos at that time because there were no permanent Church units in the islands. Elder Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles became aware of Aniceta's desire, and in his capacity as chairman of the General Servicemen's Committee, Elder Lee approved Aniceta's baptism. On Easter morning in 1946, Aniceta Fajardo was baptized by serviceman Loren Ferre and is now acknowledged as the first known Filipino to become a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Commencement of Missionary Work

After the war, Church groups were organized at two U.S. military bases—Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base—as Latter-day Saint service members looked forward to the establishment of a more formal Church presence in the Philippines. On August 21, 1955, President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) dedicated the Philippines for the preaching of the gospel. Legal restrictions, however, delayed the missionaries' arrival until 1961.

In 1960, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), then an Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, visited the Philippines for several days: "I expressed the view that missionary work will be . . . as fruitful as it has been in many other places in the world."³ The following year, after much preparation and paperwork done by members such as Maxine Tate Grimm and President Robert S. Taylor of the Southern Far East Mission as well as friends outside the Church, Elder Hinckley returned to the islands to rededicate the Philippines for the commencement of missionary work.

On April 28, 1961, in the outskirts of Manila, Elder Hinckley met with a small group of service members, American residents, and one Filipino member—David Lagman—and offered a special prayer "that there shall be many thousands who shall receive this message and be blessed thereby."⁴ Those words, uttered by a true servant of the Lord, soon became prophetic.

The first four missionaries—Raymond L. Goodson, Harry J. Murray, Kent C. Lowe, and Nester O. Ledesma—arrived in Manila several weeks later. "The Filipinos accepted the gospel very readily," Elder Lowe noted. "When the head of the family decided to join the Church, in many, many cases the entire family would join the Church."⁵

The Church Progresses

The work progressed to the point where the Philippines Mission was organized by 1967. By the end of that year, there were 3,193 members in the mission, 631 of whom had been converted that year. By 1973 the Church in the Philippines had expanded to almost 13,000 members.

On May 20, 1973, the Manila Philippines Stake was created, with Augusto A. Lim as president. In 1974 the mission was divided, creating the Philippines Manila Mission and the Philippines Cebu City Mission.

In August of 1975, President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) came to Manila to preside over the Philippines’ first area conference. August was a stormy month, making travel more difficult for those coming from outside Manila. A busload of Saints from Laoag City almost did not make it, but the Saints pushed their vehicle out of a well of mud and begged the driver not to turn back. Another group of Saints braved the stormy seas for as many as three days

find an appropriate site for a temple. After considering several sites, the director submitted a request to buy 3.5 acres (1.4 ha) in Quezon City. The site overlooks the Marikina Valley, and its location is relatively accessible to many Church members. The request was approved, and the property was purchased in January 1981. The street name was changed to Temple Drive at the request of the Church.

For the groundbreaking ceremony on August 25, 1982, despite the threat of a typhoon, about 2,000 Church members gathered from all parts of the islands by boat, train, and bus. Construction of the temple soon commenced, and it was ready to be dedicated in August 1984.

1898: Two LDS service members preach the gospel in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War



1944–45: More LDS service members preach during World War II

1946: Aniceta Fajardo becomes the first known Filipino to be baptized and confirmed a member of the Church



1955: President Joseph Fielding Smith dedicates the Philippines for the preaching of the gospel

because all that really matters, as one sister said, is to see and hear a living prophet of God.

President Kimball visited the Philippines again in 1980 to preside over another area conference, and he also met briefly with Philippines president Ferdinand Marcos. This meeting paved the way for the Church to eventually open a missionary training center in the Philippines in 1983 and dedicate the Manila Philippines Temple the following year. In 1987 the Philippines/Micronesia Area was established with headquarters in Manila.

Selections from the Book of Mormon were translated into Tagalog in 1987. Translations of the Book of Mormon are now in several languages of the Philippines, including Cebuano.

The Blessings of the Temple

In December 1980, President Spencer W. Kimball sent the director of the Church’s real estate department to Manila to

Nearly 27,000 members and nonmembers toured the temple before its dedication. They came despite two typhoons—just 48 hours apart—that had ripped through the Philippines a few days before. Saints from distant provinces arrived weary but buoyant. In many cases they had been forced to take circuitous routes to Manila because roads had been flooded and bridges damaged by overflowing rivers.

The beauty of the temple impressed the visitors, including many prominent Filipinos. Writer Celso Carunungan commented on “a feeling of holiness, that when you get inside you are going to confront your Creator.” Colonel Bienvenido Castillo, chief chaplain of the Philippine Constabulary, said the temple is “a place where you can contemplate heavenly things because you are in such an environment.” Two nuns felt the temple “is truly a house of the Lord.” Eva Estrada-Kalaw, a member of the Philippine parliament, told guides, “I wish you would build more temples here.”⁶



President Hinckley, Second Counselor in the First Presidency at the time, led the services to lay the cornerstone on Tuesday, September 25, 1984. Nine dedicatory sessions followed, held in the celestial room. Some 6,500 Saints from 16 stakes and 22 districts in the Pacific Area attended the various sessions.

As soon as the last dedicatory session was completed, Paulo V. Malit Jr. and Edna A. Yasona became the first couple to be married in the Manila Philippines Temple, on September 27, 1984. The first president of

sell their house to pay for the trip so that they and their children could be sealed as an eternal family. After they sold their home and most of their possessions, they managed to scrape together the exact amount to pay the boat fare to Manila for their family of nine. Leonides was worried because they would have no home to return to. But Bernardo assured her that the Lord would provide. They were sealed as a family for time and all eternity in the temple in 1985. It was worth every sacrifice they had made, for in the

1961: Philippines officially opens for missionary work; first four missionaries arrive

1967: Philippines Mission organized



1973: Manila Philippines Stake created

1974: Philippines Mission divided, creating the Philippines Manila and the Philippines Cebu City Missions

1975: First area conference, held in Manila

1983: Missionary training center opened in Manila



that temple, W. Garth Andrus, solemnized the marriage ceremony.

Scores of Church members queued up to receive their endowments, beginning with the ordinance workers. Temple work continued through the night into the next day.

Members felt an increased desire to enter the temple. Those who lived far from Manila had to sacrifice much to travel the great distance by boat or bus. But still they came and brought with them stories of faith and determination.

For Bernardo and Leonides Obedoza of General Santos, going to the temple in far-away Manila seemed impossible. But like the merchant man who went and sold all he had to buy one pearl of great price (see Matthew 13:45–46), this couple decided to

A Relief Society meeting on emergency preparedness provides valuable information for sisters who live in a country prone to natural disasters.



temple they found joy incomparable—their priceless pearl. And true to Bernardo’s words, the Lord did provide. On their return from Manila, kind acquaintances gave them places to stay. Their children completed their schooling, and the family eventually acquired their own home in a new location.

On April 18, 2006, the First Presidency announced the construction of the Cebu City Philippines Temple. Upon hearing the news, many Church members shed tears of joy. “We are blessed because the Lord had chosen Cebu City to be the site of the next temple,” said Cesar Perez Jr., director of the Cebu City Institute of Religion.

GROWTH OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN THE PHILIPPINES



Total Church Membership:*
675,166

Wards and Branches:
1,134

Missions: 17

Temples: 2
(another under construction)

Family History Centers: 167

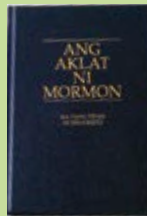
* As of September 2013



1984: Manila Philippines Temple dedicated



1987: Philippines/Micronesia Area established, with headquarters in Manila



1987: Sections of the Book of Mormon translated into Tagalog



2010: Cebu City Philippines Temple dedicated

A few months after the dedication of the Cebu City Philippines Temple, Filipino Latter-day Saints once again found reason to rejoice. On October 2, 2010, during his opening remarks in general conference, President Thomas S. Monson announced the construction of the Urdaneta Philippines Temple, in Pangasinan.

The Best Is Yet to Come

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Philippines is relatively young when compared to its presence in other countries, but its destiny in the island nation is glorious. The growth of the Church has been marvelous, and the best is yet to come. Elder Michael John U. Teh of the Seventy, the second Filipino called to serve as a General Authority, said, “We [Filipino Latter-day Saints] need to prepare ourselves spiritually more than ever before because the work will move forward with or without our help.”⁷

Indeed, as the 21st century rolls forth, the restored Church will continue to grow in size and influence as more and more Filipinos accept its message and become a blessing to this choice people upon the isles of the sea. For Elder Teh and the Filipino Saints, the “great . . . promises of the Lord unto them who are upon the isles of the sea” (2 Nephi 10:21) are now being fulfilled. ■

NOTES

1. Augusto A. Lim, in R. Lanier Britsch, “Faithful, Good, Virtuous, True’: Pioneers in the Philippines,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1997, 60.
2. Augusto Lim, in Gelene Tobias, “Augusto Lim: The Man of Many Firsts,” countrywebsites.lds.org/ph/index.php/datetime-philippines/jubilee-2011.
3. See Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1996), 213–15.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Commencement of Missionary Work in the Philippines,” *Tambuli*, Apr. 1991, 18.
5. Interview of Kent Clyde Lowe by James Neil Clark, Sept. 3, 2007.
6. Francis M. Orquiola, “Temple Dedication Rewards Faith of Filipino Saints,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 107.
7. Michael John U. Teh, “Scriptures and Spiritual Preparation” (Area Presidency Messages, May 2011), lds.org/ph/index.php/literature.