



# THE CHURCH IN Sweden

## GROWTH, EMIGRATION, AND STRENGTH

*The Church in Sweden has weathered emigration of faithful members, unfavorable media reports, and an increasingly secular environment, but the Lord is hastening His work in this choice land.*

By Inger Höglund

In 1849, President Brigham Young called a small number of men to travel to various parts of the world to preach the gospel. A former Swedish sailor, John Forsgren, who had joined the Church in Massachusetts, USA, and traveled to the Salt Lake Valley, asked President Young to be sent to Sweden as a missionary. He was called to serve and arrived in Sweden in June 1850.

Elder Forsgren first visited his younger siblings in Gävle. His brother Peter was ill, and doctors said he was beyond help. Elder Forsgren explained the purpose of his mission to his siblings, then anointed and blessed Peter, who was restored to full health. On July 19, 1850, Elder Forsgren baptized his brother, who became the first convert in Sweden.

Elder Forsgren's sister, Erika, had an interesting experience that prepared her and Peter to receive the gospel. A few months before her brother's arrival, she was attending church, as was her custom. During the singing of a hymn, she saw a person stand before her and say, "On the fifth

day of July a man will come to you with three books and all those that believe in the things written in those books shall be saved." When her brother arrived with the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants, she believed his testimony without question.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, Elder Forsgren had to leave the country after just three months. Within a few years other missionaries were sent to Sweden. They found the people in Skönabäck, in the province of Skåne, receptive to the gospel. So many were converted that the first branch was organized there in 1853 with 36 members. One of the first leaders in Skåne was Carl Capson, called as the branch president in Lund. Around 100 members attended the first Church conference in Carl's barn, which was held at night to avoid persecution.<sup>2</sup>

### Women of Faith

Women who received the gospel became pillars of strength in Sweden. One example is Britta Olsdotter



Members in Västerås met in this home in the 1950s.

would say to herself, “God should not have to wait.” She would sing a song, say a prayer, give a little talk, and then finish with another song and prayer.

When she had occasion to travel to Stockholm by train, Sister Munter would pass out tracts about the Church. Her legacy of faith continues: several of her descendants have returned to Sweden as missionaries.<sup>3</sup>

Missionaries also visited Smedjebacken, in the province of Dalarna. Among others, a Jansson family became members of the Church in 1886. A descendant of that family was Reid Johnson, a missionary who arrived in Sweden after the Second World War. He returned several times after his

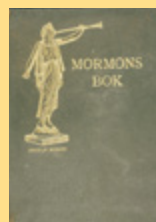
TIME LINE

1850: First missionary, John Forsgren, arrives in Sweden; first converts, Peter and Erika Forsgren, baptized



1853: First branch, Skönabäck Branch, established with 36 members

1854: Stockholm Branch established



◀ 1878: Book of Mormon translated and printed in Swedish

▶ 1904: Known by its address, Svartensgatan 3, the first Church building purchased in Sweden (shown here in 1946)

Persson, the first person to embrace the gospel in Vingåker. In 1877, to help support her family, she traveled to Stockholm to sell her weaving. There she met the missionaries and realized that they were teaching the truth and was baptized, at age 50.

Her conversion and valiant labor to promote the Lord’s work eventually led to more baptisms, and a branch was established in Vingåker. Her descendants are still active in the Church. Sister Persson’s great-great-granddaughter Laila Krylborn remarked, “It is wonderful to see what has happened in our children’s and grandchildren’s generations. Now our families have several priesthood holders and missionaries.”

Another pioneer woman was Lovisa Munter of Uppsala. She became a member in 1886 and was faithful until her death at 91 years of age. On many Sundays she went to the meeting hall, turned on the light, and waited for other members to come. Often no one came. At 11:00 a.m. she

mission—as mission president, regional representative, and temple president. The Jansson family also produced the wife of a prophet, Sister Frances Monson.

### Overcoming Persecution

For decades, persecution of Church members was severe. Many missionaries landed in prison, including Mikael Jonsson, a native Swede. He was arrested in 1852 and was brought in chains 480 miles (770 km) to Malmö, where he was thrown in the castle prison, exhausted from hunger and privation. He was visited by a priest, who found that Elder Jonsson was an intelligent man with some education. The priest declared that he was willing to help him and even promised him further education—on the condition that he join the Lutheran faith and deny “Mormonism.” Elder Jonsson would not deny his faith, so he was deported.<sup>4</sup>

Another faithful missionary was Carl A. Carlquist, born near Vänersborg in 1857. At age 17, he felt a strong desire

to preach the gospel and was called to distribute Church tracts around Jönköping. He was poor, so members of his branch, seven widows and their children, obtained a suit coat and boots for him. Carl didn't own an overcoat when the winter season came, but he was allowed to borrow one a few hours every day from some of the members when they didn't need theirs.<sup>5</sup>

Carl later emigrated to Utah and married Hulda Östergren, a Swedish immigrant. He returned to Sweden two more times on missions, including as mission president of the Scandinavian Mission. Much of his last mission was spent correcting false reports published about the Church

leaders encouraged this emigration to strengthen the Church there. The results of that emigration can be seen today: about half of Utah's inhabitants have Scandinavian roots.

However, in 1910, President Joseph F. Smith visited Stockholm and encouraged members to stay and build up the Church in Sweden.

### The Church after World War II

When the Second World War erupted, all American missionaries had to return home. Local Swedish men were then asked to serve as missionaries. C. Fritz Johansson, who had joined the Church in 1931, was called as the new



► 1905:  
Sweden  
Mission  
organized



1914: Swedish  
parliament mem-  
bers vote against  
a proposal to expel  
"Mormon agents"  
from the country

1926: Church  
receives legal  
permission to  
perform burials  
of its members

1952: New law guar-  
antees freedom for all  
non-state churches;  
the Church receives  
legal permission to  
perform marriages  
for its members

by Reverend P. E. Åslev, a pastor who had lived in Salt Lake City and was hired to promote anti-Mormon sentiment in Sweden. For instance, in 1912, Åslev wrote an article in the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* in which he claimed that Brother Carlquist was a polygamist.<sup>6</sup> Carl's efforts included meeting with King Gustaf V and refuting Åslev's claims in public meetings.<sup>7</sup>

To help combat Åslev's claims, a local member, Einar Johansson, offered to speak for the Church. He initiated legal proceedings since Åslev had also said that the Church mission office "was a white-slavery business," a libelous claim.<sup>8</sup> Brother Johansson came to mean much as a leader for the Church in Sweden, including as a branch president in Stockholm.<sup>9</sup>

Despite persecution in this era, many became converted to the gospel. The most successful year to date was 1862, when 640 persons were baptized and confirmed. Most of the converts, however, soon traveled to Utah. At the time,

mission president. One year before the war, he sold his grocery store business and became a missionary with his wife and three children. When the war was over, President Johansson and seven missionaries from Sweden were called to reopen missionary work in Finland, which had stopped because of the war.

When American missionaries returned to Sweden in 1946, they held English classes as a part of their missionary work, and many of their students became members of the Church. The growth didn't last long, however, because many Swedish members emigrated to Utah. Fear of their former enemies, encouragement by the mission president, and the chance to receive their temple ordinances motivated 250 active members to leave Sweden between 1948 and 1950.

Such a family was Oskar and Albertina Andersson, who became members of the Church in 1915. After World War II, Oskar, Albertina, and seven of their children who had



married members made the heart-rending decision to sell all they owned and “travel to Zion.” From 1949 to 1950, 29 members of the Andersson family left Sweden. Oskar and Albertina left their home, three children, and four grandchildren, whom they would never see again. They arrived in a desert and a city where the people spoke a language they did not understand. But for these faithful members, being close to the temple was more important than anything else.

Members of the Andersson family have

The members felt boundless joy when a temple was built in Stockholm and dedicated in 1985. Berit Vennerholm, a member of the Västerhaninge Ward, describes the dedication as “a much-longed for and glorious experience. What I remember most was when we all waved with our white handkerchiefs and exclaimed, ‘Hosanna!’”

The choice of a temple lot shows the hand of the Lord in the process. After many discussions with several municipalities in the Stockholm area, two suitable lots were found.

### THE CHURCH IN SWEDEN

Missions: 1  
Stakes: 4  
Districts: 1  
Wards: 24  
Branches: 16  
Members: 9,463

*1953: First member couple, Bengt-Arne Månhammar and Kerstin Skog, are married by the mission president Clarence F. Johnson*



◀ *1955: First group of Swedish members travel to the temple in Bern, Switzerland*

*1965: First meeting-house built by the Church dedicated in Gubbängen, Stockholm*



since served as missionaries and Church leaders in all parts of the world, including as an Area President in Africa and a temple president in Sweden.

Yet other members of the Church decided to stay in Sweden and became leaders. Such a one is Bo Wennerlund, a young father who was baptized in 1949. He became an important Church leader in Sweden, serving as a mission president, regional representative, and temple president.



### Temple Blessings in Sweden

Emigration largely ceased when a temple was dedicated in Switzerland in 1955. For 30 years the Swedish members made the several-day journey there by train, by bus, by car, and even by air—sometimes several times a year.



*The Mormon Tabernacle Choir performed in the Stockholm Concert Hall in 1982.*

A committee of local Church leaders suggested one of them, but the President of the Church decided that the other would be better. This decision has proven to be inspired, since the other lot later proved to be unsuitable for a temple.

Although the Church has struggled to receive positive attention in Swedish media, one time it did was in 1984, when the young brothers in the Herrey family won the largest singing contest in Europe. Their appearance on television and in newspapers gave the Church good publicity, and many young people joined the Church at this time.

In the late 1980s, another member who received good press coverage was the 35-year-old U.S. ambassador to

dispersing them from their native lands. There is a veritable hastening of work in our day in this choice land.”

The Church also grows among the members. Multi-stake conferences attract many young people from neighboring countries and contribute to the building of new families. The government’s generous child allowances and paid leave for new parents make it possible for couples to have fairly large families.

Today, most of the active young members serve missions all over the world. One returned missionary, David Halldén, the first missionary in Yekaterinburg, Russia, today has a wonderful family with six children. He relates

1975: First stake organized, in Stockholm, by then-Elder Thomas S. Monson



◀ 1985: Stockholm Temple dedicated by President Gordon B. Hinckley

1991: First members from Russia come to the Stockholm Temple; Russia and the Baltic states included in the temple district



◀ 1995: King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia hosted by President Thomas S. Monson on Stockholm Temple grounds

Sweden, Gregory Newell, who was often seen in various public events. He and his wife returned to Sweden in 2011 to preside over the Sweden Stockholm Mission until July 2014.

President Newell presided over a growing number of missionaries, from 84 to 205. Because apartments are scarce and expensive in Sweden, he describes it as “a miracle that the mission was able to find an additional 56 apartments for our newly arriving missionaries.”

### Real Growth

In the post-war era, Sweden has become an increasingly secular country. There are, however, many immigrants who are seeking God. Every sixth Swede today was born out of the country. A majority of those who join the Church in Sweden are immigrants. President Newell described some recent converts: “Brothers and sisters from 28 different countries have been converted to the Church in Sweden. I have expressed my view that the Lord is gathering Israel by

how the gospel helps his family: “There are so many voices that can lead children astray. The gospel helps us to strengthen them and get their confidence.”

Despite the secular environment and some bad publicity, many faithful members and strong Church leaders live in Sweden. The members appreciate the help that Church teachings and activities give to families and individuals, and it is their great wish that many more would receive the joyful message of Jesus Christ and His Atonement. ■

*The author lives in Sweden.*

### NOTES

1. See *Box Elder Lore of the Nineteenth Century* (1951), 58.
2. See Andrew Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission* (1979), 81.
3. See Inger Höglund and Caj-Aage Johansson, *Steg i tro* (2000), 122.
4. See Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission*, 53.
5. See Myrtle McDonald, *No Regrets: The Life of Carl A. Carlquist* (1985), 19–21.
6. See McDonald, *No Regrets*, 219.
7. See Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission*, 331.
8. In McDonald, *No Regrets*, 239.
9. See McDonald, *No Regrets*, 219.