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SACRED Transformations

The San Salvador El Salvador Temple has done more than transform the landscape; its influence is changing hearts, families, and an entire nation.

Transformation of a Hill

On September 20, 2008, approximately 600 Latter-day Saints gathered on a rain-soaked hill in the city of San Salvador, El Salvador. They stood on land that had been used for many years as a plantation. Under the direction of the Central America Area Presidency, they prayed together and shared words of testimony. Some of them sank new shovels in the ancient soil, anticipating a change that would soon come to that chosen spot.

On August 21, 2011, thousands of reverently exuberant Latter-day Saints greeted each other on that same hill. No longer a plantation, it had been transformed into the most sacred spot in El Salvador. The Saints gathered around a temple. They eagerly awaited the arrival of a prophet, President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency, who would dedicate that temple to the Lord. One longtime member of the Church, speaking almost in a whisper,



The ground-breaking for the San Salvador El Salvador Temple marked the beginning of a sacred change to the area.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ZACH GRAY, MAY NOT BE COPIED

Like the land that was transformed to build the San Salvador El Salvador Temple, the lives of Amado and Evelyn Vigil were transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

said that the place felt separated from its surroundings—“a little piece of heaven on earth.”

Transformation of a Family

In April 2010, Evelyn Vigil was concerned that her husband, Amado, was losing his faith. He had not attended any church for 11 years, having arrived at the conclusion that the true Church did not exist. Meanwhile, Evelyn had never stopped believing in God, and she went from one church to another, yearning to hear His word but never satisfied with what she heard. Some mornings she awoke in tears. On such days, she pled for guidance from her Heavenly Father. She asked Him why she never felt right in any of the churches she attended, even though she wanted so desperately to learn of Him. She also prayed that her family would someday find unity in one church.

By August 23, 2011, Amado and Evelyn Vigil had experienced a transformation not unlike the change that had occurred on that hill in their capital city. Dressed in white, they entered a sealing room with their daughter, Michelle, age nine, and their son, Christian, age three. They were the first family sealed for time and eternity in the San Salvador El Salvador Temple. Like the temple they had entered, they were newly dedicated to the Lord’s service, and they were united in their dedication.

The Vigils’ Story

“Our story began,” Amado recalls, “when we found a pair of elders—rather, when they found us. We were leaving the home of Evelyn’s parents, and we were carrying shopping bags. We noticed that the elders had seen us and were crossing the street toward us. One of them kindly asked if they could help us.

“They also asked if we would allow them to visit us. I said yes, mostly out of curiosity. Up to that point, I didn’t

know much about the Church—only comments I had heard from other people.

“After I agreed to let the elders visit our home, I told my wife, ‘Don’t get too excited about this. Don’t get any illusions about me deciding to join a church. I’m just curious to see what they have to say.’

“The elders started visiting us. I was ready to politely tell them to go away if they said anything that didn’t seem right to me. But they were so kind, and I was impressed that they never said anything bad about other churches. They taught with such love and diligence, and they were patient when I asked many questions. They quickly endeared themselves to us.”

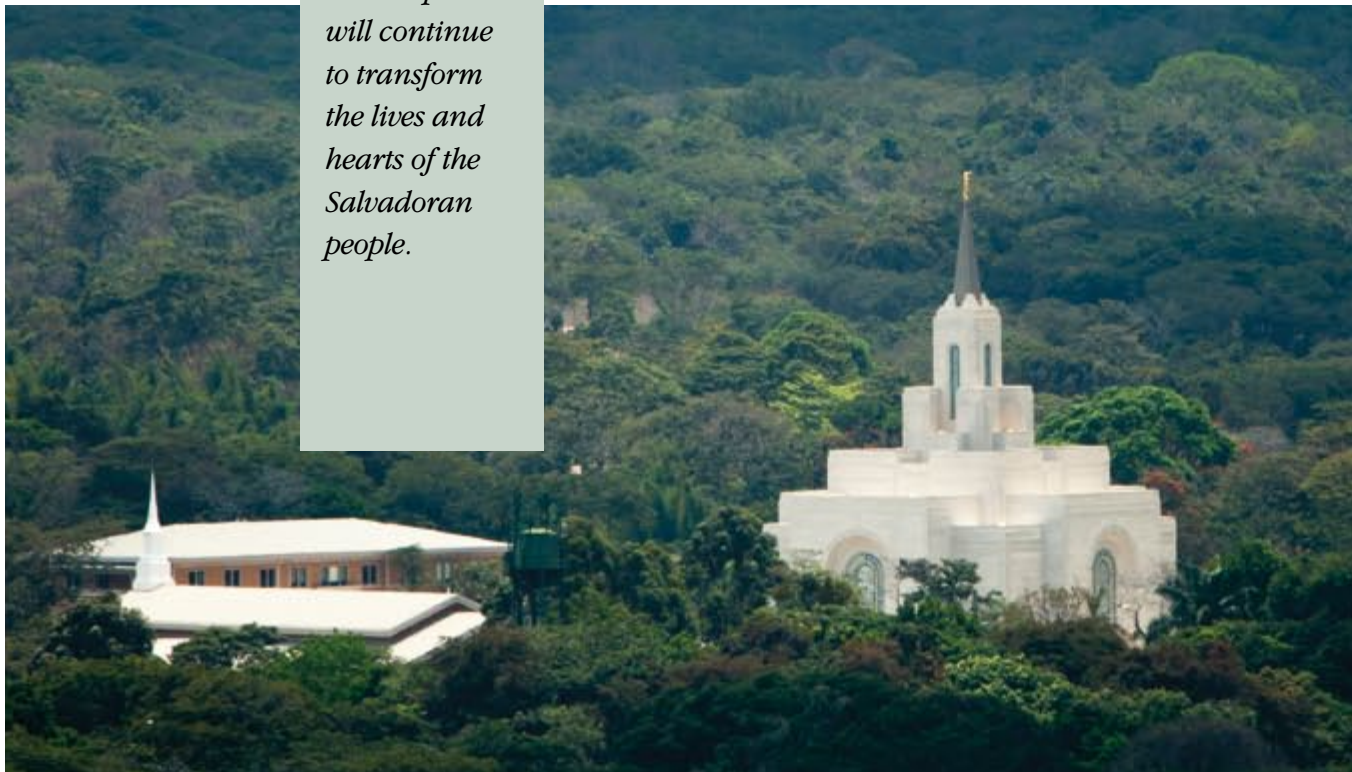
Bit by bit, Amado and Evelyn prepared themselves to be baptized and confirmed members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Evelyn’s biggest challenge was the Word of Wisdom. She was saddened by the realization that she would need to let go of her desire for coffee. Amado didn’t need to let go of any bad habits; he just needed to learn to grab hold of the truth. He believed what the missionaries were teaching, and he even recognized many doctrines and practices that he and his wife had felt were missing from other churches, such as eternal families, baptisms for the dead, and fellowship and organization in the Church. But he hesitated to commit to be baptized. He worried that he would join the Church only to find that he had made the wrong decision.

These concerns soon faded. Evelyn prayed for help and overcame her coffee habit, saying, “I’m not going to let this keep me from receiving blessings.” After about two months of indecision, Amado committed to be baptized. Now, according to Evelyn, he frequently says, “We need to embrace the doctrine.”

Changes and Blessings

Amado, Evelyn, and Michelle were baptized and confirmed in early June 2011. “From the time that we were

The temple will continue to transform the lives and hearts of the Salvadoran people.



baptized,” Evelyn says, “I could feel that everything started to change. My family was united in the Church. We had found the restored gospel. We have had trials and sickness since then, but our Heavenly Father has poured many blessings on us.”

Amado observes: “The first change I noticed was unity in our family. It’s not that we were dysfunctional before, but we started to unite more. The doctrines of the gospel helped us. As Church leaders taught us about the sacredness of the family, we thought more about the value we should place on our family.”

The Vigils’ bishop, César Orellana, also saw changes in their lives. Soon after their baptism, Amado approached Bishop Orellana and said, “We want to pay tithing, but we don’t know how.”

Bishop Orellana explained that tithing was 10 percent of their increase. Amado was somewhat concerned. At the time, Evelyn had a job, but he did not. “We always come up short,” Amado explained to his bishop, “but we want to pay tithing.”

Bishop Orellana responded, “Brother, the Lord has made many promises.” Together they read scriptures about the blessings that come from faithfully paying tithing, including the Lord’s words through the prophet Malachi: “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, . . .

and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10).

After reading these scriptures together, Bishop Orellana looked at the new convert and said, “If paying tithing means that you can’t pay for water or electricity, pay tithing. If paying tithing means that you can’t pay your rent, pay tithing. Even if paying tithing means that you don’t have enough money to feed your family, pay tithing. The Lord will not abandon you.”

The next Sunday, Amado approached Bishop Orellana again. This time he didn’t ask any questions. He simply handed his bishop an envelope and said, “Bishop, here is our tithing.”

Reflecting on this experience, Bishop Orellana says, “Ever since then, they have been faithful tithe payers.” The family received some commodities from the bishops’ storehouse during their financial difficulties. Beyond that, the Lord blessed them to be able to care for themselves. Evelyn received a promotion, and Amado found a good job. Evelyn later lost her job, but they continued to pay tithing and to receive spiritual and temporal blessings for their faithfulness. Once Bishop Orellana asked Amado how the family was doing financially. Amado responded,

“We’re doing all right. Sometimes we don’t have much to eat, but we have enough. And more than anything, we trust in the Lord.”

After paying tithing for some time, Evelyn and Amado spoke with Bishop Orellana about the blessings they had received. Referring to Malachi 3:10, they said, “We have proven the Lord.” And true to Bishop Orellana’s promise, the Lord never abandoned them.

A New Perspective

Evelyn and Amado speak tenderly of the day their family gathered in the sealing room. They had worried that by the time they were endowed and ready for the sealing ordinance that same day, their children would be restless. They were particularly concerned about their energetic three-year-old son, Christian. But the children entered the sealing room with peaceful reverence, suggesting that they understood the reason they were there. And when it was time for the children to participate in the sealing ordinance, Christian, without any instruction or prompting, walked to the altar and kneeled by his parents.

Evelyn remembers seeing the family’s reflection in the mirrors. Amado also speaks of seeing, not only in the temple but in everyday life. He expresses gratitude for the eternal perspective that now guides his life—a perspective that Michelle and Christian seemed to sense when they were in the Lord’s house. This perspective has expanded even more since then, especially as the Vigils have welcomed a new daughter into the family—Andrea, who was born in the covenant in August.

A Light upon a Hill

The Vigil family will be forever changed through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the influence of His temple in their land. Because a plantation has been



The Vigils were the first family to be sealed in the San Salvador El Salvador Temple, dedicated in August 2011.

transformed into sacred ground, their own home has become more sacred.

In many ways they represent the promise of an entire nation. El Salvador is home to millions of good, honest people who are bombarded every day by the noise and allure of the world. The Salvadoran Saints love their homeland, and they find renewed hope as they see the Lord’s temple there. They find assurance in the following words from the temple’s dedicatory prayer given by President Eyring:

“We pray for Thy blessings to rest upon this nation of El Salvador. Touch the hearts of those who govern, that the people may be blessed with freedom and opportunity. May peace reign in the land.

“Prosper Thy work in this land. May the gospel message touch the hearts of people throughout the nation. May they come into the waters of baptism, and remain faithful and true unto Thee. . . .

“ . . . With grateful hearts, we dedicate and consecrate this hallowed structure and its surroundings to the accomplishment of Thy will and the fulfillment of Thine eternal work. We pray that its influence may be felt throughout the land as a light upon a hill.”¹

Much of this influence is sure to be felt through the service and example of people like the Vigil family. Brushing back tears and struggling to speak through his emotion, Amado Vigil now speaks lovingly of the missionaries who made it possible for him and his family to come unto Christ and receive the blessings of the temple. “It is our hope that our children will serve missions,” he says, “so they can bless other families, just as those young men blessed ours.” ■

NOTE

1. “‘May Peace Reign in the Land’—Dedicatory Prayer for El Salvador Temple,” *Church News*, Aug. 27, 2011, ldschurchnews.com.