

The Expanding Church

From 1901 to 1970, four prophets presided over an expanding Church—Joseph F. Smith, Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, and David O. McKay. These Presidents witnessed the transition from horse and buggy transportation to travel by rocket into outer space. Two world wars and a global depression challenged the Saints. During this time, nine temples were built. In 1901, there were approximately 300,000 members in 50 stakes, and by 1970 the Church had over 2,800,000 members gathered in 500 stakes throughout the world.

President Joseph F. Smith

Joseph F. Smith was born in 1838 during the height of the Missouri persecutions in a small cabin near the temple site in Far West. At the time of Joseph's birth, his father, Hyrum Smith, was imprisoned at Richmond, Missouri, and his mother, Mary Fielding Smith, was left alone to care for her children.

Young Joseph moved with his family from Missouri to Nauvoo, Illinois, where an event occurred that he remembered for the rest of his life—the murder of his father and uncle at Carthage Jail. Joseph never forgot seeing his father for the last time when, on the way to Carthage on horseback, he picked up his son, kissed him, and set him down. Nor could he forget the terror of hearing a neighbor rap on the window at night to tell his mother that Hyrum had been killed. The sight of his father and uncle lying in their coffins in the Mansion House in Nauvoo never faded from his memory.

The boy Joseph became a man almost overnight. When Mary Fielding Smith and her family joined the exodus from Nauvoo,

7-year-old Joseph was the teamster of one of her wagons. Joseph was 13 when his mother died, leaving him an orphan, and before he turned 16, he left on a mission to the Sandwich Islands (later called the Hawaiian Islands). Within three months after arriving in Honolulu, he spoke the native tongue fluently, a spiritual gift conferred upon him by Elders Parley P. Pratt and Orson Hyde of the Twelve, who set him apart. When he was 21, he left for another mission, this time for three years in the British Isles.

Joseph was only 28 when President Brigham Young was impressed to ordain him an Apostle. In subsequent years he served as a Counselor to four Church Presidents. When Lorenzo Snow died in October 1901, Joseph F. Smith became the sixth President of the Church. He was well known for his ability to expound and defend gospel truths. His sermons and writings were compiled into a volume titled *Gospel Doctrine*, which has become one of the important doctrinal texts of the Church.

In the opening decades of the twentieth century, the Church moved forward in several important ways. With the continued emphasis on tithing and the Saints' faithful response, the Church was able to pay off all its debts. A period of prosperity followed, enabling the Church to build temples, chapels, and visitors' centers and to purchase Church historical sites. The Church also built the Administration Building in Salt Lake City that still serves as its headquarters.

President Smith recognized the need for temples throughout the world. At a 1906 conference in Bern, Switzerland, he stretched out his hand and declared, "The time will come when this land will be dotted with temples, where you can go and redeem your dead."¹ The first latter-day temple in Europe, the Swiss Temple, was dedicated nearly half a century later in a suburb of the city where President Smith made his prophecy. President Smith dedicated land for a temple in Cardston, Alberta, Canada, in 1913 and for a temple in Hawaii in 1915.

Beginning in the early 1900s, Church leaders encouraged Saints to remain in their own lands rather than gather to Utah.

In 1911 Joseph F. Smith and his Counselors in the First Presidency issued this statement: "It is desirable that our people shall remain in their native lands and form congregations of a permanent character to aid in the work of proselyting."²

Six weeks before President Smith died, he received an important revelation about the redemption of the dead. He saw in vision the Savior's ministry in the spirit world and learned that faithful Saints have the opportunity to continue teaching the gospel in the world of spirits. This revelation was added to the Pearl of Great Price in 1976 and in 1979 was transferred to the Doctrine and Covenants as section 138.

President Heber J. Grant

Shortly before his death in November 1918, President Joseph F. Smith took Heber J. Grant, then President of the Twelve, by the hand and said: "The Lord bless you, my boy, the Lord bless you, you have got a great responsibility. Always remember that this is the Lord's work, and not man's. The Lord is greater than any man. He knows whom He wants to lead His Church, and never makes any mistake."³ Heber J. Grant became the seventh President of the Church at age 62, having served as an Apostle since 1882.

As a young man and throughout his life, Heber showed an unusual determination in achieving his goals. As an only child reared by a widowed mother, he was somewhat sheltered from the activities of other boys his age. When he tried out for the baseball team, he was teased for his awkwardness and lack of skill and was not accepted as a team member. Instead of becoming discouraged, he spent many hours of persistent practice in throwing a ball and eventually became a member of another team that won several local championships.

As a boy he wanted to become a bookkeeper when he learned that it would pay much more than his job of shining shoes. In those days, being a bookkeeper required good penmanship skills, but his writing was so bad that two of his friends said it looked like hen tracks. Once again, he was not discouraged but spent



The Church established welfare farms to help provide food for the needy. Church members contributed their labor, as illustrated by these Saints working on a sugar beet farm in 1933.

many hours practicing his penmanship. He became well known for his ability to write beautifully, eventually taught penmanship at a university, and was often called on to write important documents. He was a great example to many people who saw his determination to do the best he could in serving the Lord and his fellowmen.

President Grant was a wise and successful businessman whose skills helped him lead the Church through a worldwide financial depression and the personal problems that resulted from it. He firmly believed in being self-reliant and in depending on the Lord and his own hard work, not on the government. He blessed many needy people with the money he earned.

In the 1930s the Saints, like many other people in the world, were struggling with unemployment and poverty during the Great Depression. In 1936, as a result of revelation from the Lord,

President Grant established the welfare program of the Church to assist those in need and help all members become self-reliant. The First Presidency said of this program: "Our primary purpose was to set up, in so far as it might be possible, a system under which the curse of idleness would be done away with, the evils of a dole abolished, and independence, industry, thrift and self respect be once more established amongst our people. The aim of the Church is to help the people to help themselves. Work is to be re-enthroned as the ruling principle of the lives of our Church membership."⁴

President J. Reuben Clark Jr., who served as a Counselor in the First Presidency for 28 years, emphasized, "The real long term objective of the Welfare Plan is the building of character in the members of the Church, givers and receivers, rescuing all that is finest down deep inside of them, and bringing to flower and fruitage the latent richness of the spirit."⁵

A General Welfare Committee was established in 1936 to oversee welfare efforts in the Church. Harold B. Lee, president of the Pioneer Stake, was made the committee's managing director. Later, Deseret Industries stores were developed to help the unemployed and handicapped, and farms and production projects were established to help the needy. The welfare program continues to bless thousands of people today, both needy Church members and others in destitute circumstances throughout the world.⁶

While missionary work continued at an expanded pace, President Grant was instrumental in a most unusual conversion. Vincenzo di Francesca, an Italian minister of religion, was walking down a New York City street toward his church when he saw a book without a cover in a barrel full of ashes. He picked up the book, turned the pages, and saw for the first time the names Nephi, Mosiah, Alma, and Moroni. He felt impressed to read the book even though he did not know its name or origin, and to pray about its truthfulness. As he did, he said that "a feeling of gladness, as of finding something precious and extraordinary, bore consolation to my soul and left me with a joy that human

language cannot find words to describe.” He began teaching the principles in the book to the members of his church. His church leaders disciplined him for doing so and even directed him to burn the book, something he refused to do.

He later returned to Italy, where in 1930 he learned that the book was published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He wrote a letter to the Church in Utah that was forwarded to President Grant. President Grant sent him a copy of the Book of Mormon in Italian and gave his name to the president of the European mission. The difficulties of wartime prevented Vincenzo from being baptized for many years, but he was finally able to become a member of the Church on 18 January 1951, the first person baptized on the island of Sicily. Five years later he was endowed in the Swiss Temple.⁷

On 6 May 1922 President Grant dedicated the Church’s first radio station. Two years later the station began broadcasting sessions of general conference, allowing many more Church members to hear the messages of the General Authorities. Not long thereafter, in July of 1929, the Tabernacle Choir aired the first program of *Music and the Spoken Word*, a weekly broadcast of inspirational music and spoken message. This program has continued to be broadcast each week to the present time.

President Grant died on 14 May 1945. His 27 years of service as President of the Church are exceeded in length only by Brigham Young’s years of service.

President George Albert Smith

George Albert Smith succeeded Heber J. Grant as Church President. President Smith, whose life was an example of the happiness found in gospel living, testified: “Every happiness and every joy that has been worthy of the name has been the result of keeping the commandments of God and observing his advice and counsel.”⁸

Obeying the commandments of God and the counsel of Church leaders had been a pattern of righteousness in President

Smith's family for generations. He was named for his paternal grandfather, George A. Smith, who was a cousin to the Prophet Joseph and a Counselor to President Brigham Young. George Albert's father, John Henry Smith, served in the First Presidency under Joseph F. Smith. At the age of 33, George Albert Smith was called to the Quorum of the Twelve. From 1903 to 1910, John Henry and George Albert served together in the Quorum of the Twelve, the only time in this dispensation that a father and son have served together in that Quorum.

George Albert Smith's 42 years in the Quorum of the Twelve were filled with noble service, despite episodes of poor health. His eyes were damaged by the sun while surveying for the railroad in southern Utah, and surgery failed to correct his near blindness. Increased pressures and demands on his time weakened his frail body, and in 1909 he collapsed from exhaustion. The doctor's order of complete rest eroded his self-confidence, created feelings of worthlessness, and aggravated his tension.

During this difficult time, George had a dream in which he saw a beautiful forest near a large lake. After he had walked some distance through the forest, he recognized his beloved grandfather, George A. Smith, coming toward him. George hurried forward, but as his grandfather drew near, he stopped and said, "I would like to know what you have done with my name." A panorama of his life passed through George's mind and he humbly replied, "I have never done anything with your name of which you need be ashamed." This dream renewed George's spirit and physical stamina and he was soon able to return to work. Later he often described the experience as a major turning point in his life.⁹

During President George Albert Smith's administration, which lasted from 1945 to 1951, the number of members in the Church reached one million; the temple in Idaho Falls, Idaho, was dedicated; and missionary work was resumed after World War II.

Also, efforts were organized for relief of the European Saints who had become destitute as a result of the war. Church members in the United States were encouraged to contribute clothing and

other commodities. President Smith met with Harry S. Truman, president of the United States, to receive approval to send the collected food, clothing, and bedding to Europe. President Smith described the meeting in this way:

President Truman said: “ ‘What do you want to ship it over there for? Their money isn’t any good.’

“I said, ‘We don’t want their money.’ He looked at me and asked: ‘You don’t mean you are going to give it to them?’

“I said: ‘Of course, we would give it to them. They are our brothers and sisters and are in distress. God has blessed us with a surplus, and we will be glad to send it if we can have the co-operation of the government.’

“He said: ‘You are on the right track,’ and added, ‘we will be glad to help you in any way we can.’ ”¹⁰

While the donations were being sorted and packaged in Utah to ship overseas, President Smith came to observe the preparations. Tears ran down his face when he saw the great volume of commodities that had been so generously contributed. After a few minutes he removed his new overcoat and said, “Please ship this.” Although several people standing nearby told him that he needed his coat on the cold wintry day, he insisted that it be sent.¹¹

Elder Ezra Taft Benson of the Quorum of the Twelve was assigned to reopen the missions in Europe, see to the distribution of relief supplies, and administer to the spiritual needs of the Saints. One of Elder Benson’s early visits was to a conference of the Saints in Karlsruhe, a German city on the Rhine River. Elder Benson said of the experience:

“We finally found our way to the meeting place, a partially bombed-out building located in the interior of a block. The Saints had been in session for some two hours waiting for us, hoping that we would come because the word had reached them that we might be there for the conference. And then for the first time in my life I saw almost an entire audience in tears as we walked up onto the platform, and they realized that at last, after six or seven long years, representatives from Zion, as they put it, had finally



President Cornelius Zappey and missionaries in the Netherlands Mission handling welfare potatoes for German Saints, 1947

come back to them. . . . As I looked into their upturned faces, pale, thin, many of these Saints dressed in rags, some of them barefooted, I could see the light of faith in their eyes as they bore testimony to the divinity of this great latter-day work, and expressed their gratitude for the blessings of the Lord."¹²

Among his many responsibilities, Elder Benson supervised the distribution of 127 railroad carloads of food, clothing, bedding, and medicine throughout Europe. Years later when President Thomas S. Monson was dedicating a new chapel in Zwickau, Germany, an older brother came forward with tears in his eyes and asked to be remembered to President Ezra Taft Benson. He said to "tell him he saved my life, and those of scores of my brothers and sisters in my native land because of the food and clothing he brought to us from members of the Church in America."¹³

The Dutch Saints had the opportunity to give true Christian service to the starving Saints in Germany. The Dutch members had suffered much during the war and then had received welfare

assistance from Church members in the United States. In the spring of 1947, they were asked to begin welfare projects of their own, which they enthusiastically did. They primarily planted potatoes and were expecting a large harvest.

During this time, President Walter Stover of the East German Mission came to Holland and, with tears in his eyes, told of the hunger and desolation of the Church members in Germany. President Cornelius Zappey, the president of the Netherlands Mission, asked his members whether they would supply their growing potatoes to the Germans, who had been their enemies during the war. The members willingly agreed and began to watch their potato crops with increased interest. The harvest was far greater than anyone had expected, and the Dutch Saints were able to send 75 tons of potatoes to their brothers and sisters in Germany. One year later, the Dutch Saints sent 90 tons of potatoes and 9 tons of herring to the Saints in Germany.¹⁴

The outpouring of Christlike love shown by these Saints was typical of President George Albert Smith, who radiated the love of Christ to an extraordinary extent. He said, "I can say to you, my brethren and sisters, the happiest people in this world are those who love their neighbors as themselves and manifest their appreciation of God's blessings by their conduct in life."¹⁵

President David O. McKay

David O. McKay was a Counselor to President George Albert Smith in the First Presidency. In the spring of 1951, when it appeared that President Smith's health had become somewhat better, President McKay and his wife, Emma Rae, decided to leave Salt Lake City for their postponed California vacation. They stopped in St. George, Utah, to spend the night. When President McKay awoke early the next morning, he had the distinct impression that he should return to Church headquarters. Within days after he arrived in Salt Lake City, President Smith suffered a stroke that led to his death on 4 April 1951. David O. McKay then became the Church's ninth President.



*President David O. McKay as a young boy with his family.
David is on his father's lap.*

President McKay had been well prepared to lead the Church. As a child of eight years, he assumed the responsibilities of man of the house when his father was called on a mission to the British Isles. Two of his older sisters had just recently died, his mother was expecting another baby, and his father felt that the responsibilities of the farm were too great to be left to David's mother. Under these circumstances Brother McKay told his wife, "Of course it is impossible for me to go." Sister McKay looked at him and said, "Of course you must accept; you need not worry about me. David O. and I will manage things nicely!"¹⁶ The faith and dedication of his parents implanted in young David a desire to serve the Lord throughout his life. He was called to the Council of the Twelve in 1906 at the age of 32, and he served in that Council and in the First Presidency (as Counselor to President Heber J. Grant and President George Albert Smith) for 45 years before becoming President of the Church.

President McKay began an extensive travel schedule that took him to visit members of a Church that had become worldwide. He visited Saints in Great Britain and Europe, South Africa, Latin

America, the South Pacific, and other places. While he was in Europe, he made preliminary arrangements for the construction of temples in London and Switzerland. Before his Presidency ended, he had visited almost the entire world, blessing and inspiring members of the Church.

President McKay gave renewed emphasis to missionary work by urging every member to make a commitment to bring at least one new member into the Church each year. He became well known for his repeated admonition: "Every member a missionary."

In 1952, in an effort to increase the effectiveness of full-time missionaries, the first official proselyting plan was sent to missionaries throughout the world. It was titled *A Systematic Program for Teaching the Gospel*. It included seven missionary discussions that emphasized teaching by the Spirit and taught clearly the nature of the Godhead, the plan of salvation, the Apostasy and Restoration, and the importance of the Book of Mormon. The number of people converted to the Church throughout the world increased dramatically. In 1961 Church leaders convened the first seminar for all mission presidents, who were taught to encourage families to fellowship their friends and neighbors and then have these people taught by missionaries in their homes. A language training program for newly called missionaries was established in 1961, and later a missionary training center was constructed.

During President McKay's administration, the seeds for the growth of the Church in Asia were planted by Church members serving in the armed forces. A young private from American Fork, Utah, serving in South Korea, noticed that United States soldiers who met Korean civilians made the Koreans jump aside off the path while the soldiers passed by. The young Church member, in contrast, moved aside and let the Koreans use the paths. He also made an effort to learn their names and greeted them pleasantly as he passed by. One day he entered the mess hall with five of his friends. The line to get the food was very long, so he waited at a table for a time. Soon a Korean worker appeared with a tray of

food. Pointing to the one stripe on his arm, the soldier said, "You can't serve me. I'm only a private." The Korean replied, "I serve you. You Number One Christian."¹⁷

By 1967 missionaries and servicemen had been so effective in teaching the gospel in Korea that the Book of Mormon was translated into the Korean language and stakes and wards soon dotted that land.

Missionaries also had great success in Japan. After World War II, Church members in Japan had infrequent contact with Church representatives for several years. But Latter-day Saint servicemen stationed in Japan after the war helped the Church to grow stronger. In 1945, Tatsui Sato was impressed by Latter-day Saint servicemen who declined to drink tea, and he asked them questions that led to his baptism and the baptisms of several of his family members the following year. Elliot Richards baptized Tatsui, and Boyd K. Packer, a serviceman who would later become a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, baptized Sister Sato. The Sato home served as the place where many Japanese people first heard the message of the restored gospel. Soon Latter-day Saint missionaries who had fought against the Japanese during World War II were opening Japanese cities to missionary work.

While the Church presence in the Philippines can also be traced to the efforts of American servicemen and others after World War II, the strong growth of the Church began there in 1961. A young Filipino woman who was not a member of the Church heard about the Book of Mormon and met several Latter-day Saints. As a result, she felt impressed to approach government officials with whom she was acquainted to ask that approval be given for Latter-day Saint missionaries to come to the Philippines. The approval was given and just months later, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley of the Quorum of the Twelve rededicated the country for missionary work.

As a result of the Church's dramatic growth during the 1950s, President McKay announced the priesthood correlation program. A committee, chaired by Elder Harold B. Lee of the Quorum of the

Twelve, was assigned to conduct a thorough, prayerful study of all Church programs to see how well they met the Church's most important objectives. In 1961, with First Presidency approval, Elder Lee announced that policies would be developed to govern the planning, writing, and implementation of all Church curriculum materials. Many of these materials had previously been developed by the Church's auxiliary organizations. This new direction would avoid unnecessary duplication of programs and lesson materials so that the gospel could be more effectively taught to members of all ages and languages in a worldwide Church.

The Church also made other changes in order to more effectively correlate all programs and activities—including welfare, missionary, and family history work—to better accomplish the Church's mission. Home teaching, which had been part of the Church since the time of Joseph Smith, was reemphasized in the 1960s as a way to help care for the spiritual and temporal needs of all Church members. Meetinghouse libraries were established to enhance teaching, and a teacher development program was also put in place. In 1971 the Church began publishing three English-language magazines under General Authority supervision: the *Friend* for children, the *New Era* for young people, and the *Ensign* for adults. At about this same time, the Church unified its foreign language magazines that had previously been published independently by various missions. One magazine is now translated into many languages and sent to Church members throughout the world.

President David O. McKay had long emphasized the importance of home and family life as the source of happiness and the surest defense against the trials and temptations of modern life. He often spoke about the love he felt for his family and the unflinching support he received from his wife, Emma Rae. During President McKay's administration, the practice of holding weekly family home evenings was strongly reemphasized as a way for parents to draw their children closer to them and teach them the principles of the gospel.

The Relief Society supported the prophet in emphasizing the importance of strengthening homes and families. From its beginnings in Nauvoo, the Relief Society had grown to include hundreds of thousands of women throughout the world, who were blessed personally and in their families by the teaching and associations they received through Relief Society. From 1945 to 1974, the general president of the Relief Society was President Belle S. Spafford, a capable leader who also received national recognition when she served as the president of the United States National Council of Women from 1968 to 1970.

President McKay died in January 1970 at age 96. He had presided over the Church for almost 20 years, during which time the membership of the Church increased almost threefold and great strides were made in taking the message of the gospel to the entire world.