

A Brief History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Western Pennsylvania



EARLY CHURCH HISTORY IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA, EASTERN OHIO AND NORTHERN WEST VIRGINIA

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized in New York in 1830. Shortly thereafter, Joseph Smith, the Prophet and President of the Church, received revelation that Church members were to gather in northeast Ohio. Kirtland, Ohio (located 20 miles from Cleveland, Ohio, and 135 miles from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), served as the Church's headquarters from 1831 until 1838. During that time, the Church's membership grew from about 680 to nearly 18,000. At that time, Pittsburgh's population was about 21,000. The Church's first temple was dedicated in Kirtland in 1836, and it still stands as an important historical monument for members of the Church today.

Many prominent Church members, including Brigham Young, labored as missionaries in western Pennsylvania and southeastern Ohio at various times in the 1830s and 1840s, and branches (congregations) of the Church were established in Pittsburgh and other locations in the area. Most of these Church members migrated westward with the main body of the Church in the 1840s and 1850s.

CHURCH GROWTH

In the 1880s, Church missionaries from the west began preaching again in the area, and new branches and smaller congregations were established throughout the area over the next several decades. In 1943, the West Penn District was formed. It included three branches — one in Pittsburgh, one in Wilson (in Pittsburgh's South Hills) and one in Washington — and smaller congregations in outlying areas from Johnstown on the east to Punxsutawney on the north to Waynesburg on the south. By 1949, a branch was added in State College. At the time, the district encompassed all of western Pennsylvania and into western New York and had about 750 members. Within a decade, the Pittsburgh Branch itself had grown to almost a thousand members.

Other districts in the area included the Northern Ohio District, which in 1929 included branches in Akron, Cleveland and Columbus; the Erie District, which in 1929 included two branches (in Erie, Pennsylvania, and Jamestown, New York); and the Fairmont District, which included branches in Fairmont, Morgantown, Masontown, Clarksburg, Grafton and Mannington in West Virginia.

Over the years, the Church has enjoyed steady growth in western Pennsylvania, northeastern Ohio and northern West Virginia. There are currently 10 stakes (a stake is similar to a diocese), 80 congregations and 29,000 Church members in the area.

THE COMMUNITY AND THE CHURCH TODAY

Church members provide volunteer service to numerous nonprofit organizations, many of which have volunteer projects listed on JustServe.org, a website hosted by the Church that connects volunteers with nonprofit organizations. Church members also provide free family history research assistance at FamilySearch centers throughout the area. During the past two years, the Church has provided approximately 115,000 pounds of food to area food banks, churches and food pantries and more than \$220,000 in humanitarian grants to area nonprofit organizations.

THE PITTSBURGH PENNSYLVANIA TEMPLE

On April 5, 2020, Church President Russell M. Nelson announced plans to construct a temple in Pittsburgh. Previously, many Church members in the area traveled more than three hours to attend the nearest temple. The Pittsburgh Pennsylvania Temple is the second to be constructed in the state, the first being the Philadelphia Pennsylvania Temple, which was constructed in 2016. At a general conference of the Church held on April 2, 2023, President Nelson announced plans to construct a third temple in the state, which will be located in Harrisburg.

