

https://www.idahopress.com/meridian/news/sacred-not-secret-new-meridian-temple-to-open-for-public-tours/article_6b439e33-d0b4-547d-8a84-b0e54d4e89b3.html

TOP STORY

'Sacred,' not secret: New Meridian temple to open for public tours

By Holly Beech hbeech@mymeridianpress.com

Oct 16, 2017



Editor's note: Dieter F. Uchtdorf is the Second Counselor in the First Presidency for the LDS Church. The original version of this story listed his title incorrectly.

There are misconceptions about what goes on inside a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints temple, church member LeeRen Walker said Monday during a media tour of the new temple in Meridian.

Hopefully, he said, public tours of temples will help dispel any myths, such as what happens during marriage ceremonies and why members wear white clothing.

The Meridian temple, at 7345 N. Linder Road, will be open for tours Oct. 21 through Nov. 11 and will be dedicated Nov. 19. Roughly 200,000 to 300,000 people are expected to take a tour, open house coordinator Elder Craig Rowe said.

Normally temples are open only to Mormons who have a recommendation from their local bishop confirming they are in good standing with the church. But when a temple is newly built or remodeled, it's open for public tours before the dedication ceremony.

The temple is seen as the house of God — the most sacred physical space on earth, said Elder Quentin L. Cook, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who led the media tour. That's why it is open only to faithful church members once dedicated, he said.

"Sometimes people think that things are secret that are really sacred," Cook said.

When visiting the temple, Mormons change into white clothing, which represents purity and equality, Cook said. The simple, uniform clothing eliminates signs of status or accomplishments, he said.

The temple isn't used for large gatherings, and it's closed on Sundays, Cook said. It serves as a space for prayer, sacred ceremonies, teachings about God and commitments to living a moral life, he said.

"For many, it's a very sacred feeling," Cook said.

For Walker, a church member from Middleton, one of the most meaningful aspects of the temple is the sealing of families for eternity. The Walkers have grieved the loss of children and grandchildren, and believing they will all be together again as a family brings tremendous hope, Walker said.

THE BUILDING

It took about 2,000 people to build the Meridian temple, said Thomas A. Coburn, managing director of the temple department for the LDS Church. Utah-based Richardson Design Partnership designed the temple, and Jacobsen Construction was the contractor.

Finding enough skilled workers for the high standard of craftsmanship was a challenge, Coburn said. Fine materials such as sapele wood and Egyptian marble were used.

Temples, such as the one built by King Solomon in the Old Testament of the Bible, are built with the finest materials as a way to honor God, Cook said.

The golds, blues and greens in the wool rugs and stained glass in the Meridian temple reflect Idaho harvest and nature, Coburn said. Large paintings show the life of Jesus Christ and modern scenes of nature, including the Sawtooth mountains. Some of the original artwork was done by

Idaho artists.

The Meridian temple is one of the larger LDS temples at 67,331 square feet. Many are 15,000 to 17,000 square feet, Cook said. The temple is over 109 feet tall, not including a more than 11-foot statue of the angel Moroni, a common feature of temples.

The new Meridian temple district stretches into eastern Oregon, including roughly 60,000 church members in 16 stakes and 120 congregations, Cook said.



Some of the stained glass windows in the new Meridian temple include images of Syringa flower, Idaho's state flower.

Courtesy of the LDS Church

The LDS Church has 158 temples worldwide and 24 others that have been announced.

The Meridian temple is the fifth in Idaho, and a sixth will be built in Pocatello.

The Meridian temple's construction value was \$41 million, according to the Ada County building permit provided to the Meridian Press through public record request. That amount represents the estimated cost to build the temple, including site work, at the onset of the project. The total building permit fee was \$214,245.

The LDS Church does not discuss the cost to build temples, Cook said, noting that the church also gives large amounts to charity. Construction is funded through members' regular contributions, called tithes, and temples are paid off when they open, he said.

Management and oversight of temples is largely done by volunteers.

TEMPLE CEREMONIES, ACTIVITIES

One of the most sacred ceremonies that takes place in the temple is the marriage ceremony, in which couples are “sealed” together for eternity. The Meridian temple has five sealing rooms on the third floor. On a Saturday in June, it wouldn’t be unusual for six to 10 ceremonies to take place, Coburn said.

The basement of the temple has a baptismal font — a small marble pool filled with water — where church members can be baptized on behalf of someone who has died. The font sits on sculptures of 12 oxen, representing the 12 tribes of Israel from the Bible.



One of five sealing rooms at the Meridian temple, where marriage ceremonies are performed.

Courtesy of the LDS Church

On the second floor are instruction rooms for teachings about scripture and commitments to God. The instruction is largely done through videos, though in some temples people still act out the lessons, Cook said. The teachings in the temple are



available in 83 languages. Members can pick up headphones for the translation upon arrival.

Next to the instruction rooms is what is considered to be the most sacred room in the temple, the Celestial room, Cook said. He asked those attending Monday's tour to observe this room in silence.

The Celestial room has tall ceilings, white walls with golden accents and a large crystal chandelier. The room is a place to pray and contemplate life decisions, Cook said.

"It's designed to evoke the most sacred things here on earth," he said.

TEMPLE TOURS, DEDICATION

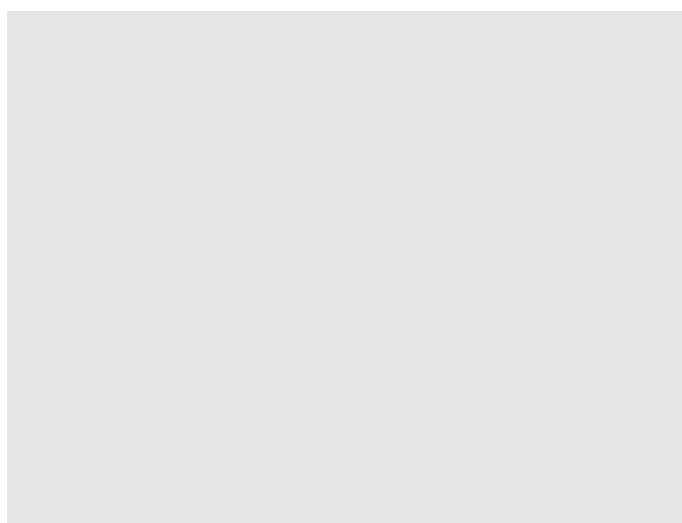
Sign-ups for a free tour of the Meridian temple are available at templeopenhouse.lds.org. Tours are available for church members and non-members from Oct. 21 through Nov. 11, other than on Sundays.

One of the top church leaders, Second Counselor in the First Presidency Dieter F. Uchtdorf, will dedicate the temple on Nov. 19. The church will hold three temple dedication sessions at 9 a.m., 12 p.m. and 3 p.m. The dedication will be broadcast to members of the church in Idaho and the temple district. The three-hour block of meetings will be cancelled so those congregation members can participate, according to a press release from the church.



A baptismal font in the new Meridian temple provides a place for baptisms on behalf of deceased ancestors.

Courtesy of the LDS Church



The Celestial room is considered the most sacred in the temple and is used for prayer and contemplation.

Courtesy of the LDS Church

As part of the open house and dedication activities, 6,000 local youth will participate in a cultural celebration honoring Idaho and LDS church history on Nov. 18 at the Taco Bell Arena in Boise.

Construction of the Meridian temple started August 2014. Idaho's four other temples are in Boise, Rexburg, Twin Falls and Idaho Falls. Approximately 426,000 Mormons live in Idaho.

HISTORY

The LDS Church's roots in Meridian stem back to the 1920s, when members moved to the area because of the fertile land and long growing season, according to Cook.

The first formal meeting is recorded on April 29, 1932, when about 40 Mormons gathered in a local funeral parlor. After awhile, church services were moved to a local dance hall.

"They cleaned up after the revelry of Saturday night in order to have their Sunday meeting," Cook said.

Throughout this year, church members Jim and Susan Thomas of Star have been gathering items to place in a cornerstone box that will be secured on the east side of the temple for years to come. The box will likely stay unopened until the temple is remodeled, which could be 50 years from now, Jim Thomas said.

The couple has collected personal stories of the committee members working on the temple opening, historical documents and newspaper articles — including articles about the opposition to the temple construction, Susan Thomas said.

There are also items in the box to remind people of what 2017 was like, such as eclipse glasses and articles about the total solar eclipse.

One of the books in the cornerstone box is “The History of the LDS Church in the Meridian Idaho Area,” written by Charles B. Sturgell. The Thomases tracked down a phone number for Sturgell, who lives in St. George, Utah, after finding his book at the Meridian Library.

Sturgell, 89, was born in Meridian. His grandparents converted to Mormonism in 1904 after meeting a missionary in Kentucky. They later moved to Idaho and farmed in the Treasure Valley. In 1969, the Sturgell family bought and moved into the old Roosevelt school on Black Cat Road north of the railroad tracks.

“Yeah, we had a gym in our basement,” Sturgell’s daughter, Samila Sturgell Nickell, said.

Sturgell decided to write a book on history in the 1980s. His aunt was over for a visit, and she asked him if he knew where the old Roosevelt school was because she used to walk there as a girl.

“I said, ‘Well, you’re sitting in it,’” Sturgell said.

As Sturgell asked his aunt more about her childhood, he was inspired to write a book about the history of Meridian and how the LDS Church was established here. The book, edited by Nickell, was published in 1998 and is available at the Meridian Library and Boise State University library, Jim Thomas said.

HollyBeechMP