

Temples Have Proliferated in 20 Years Since Smaller Design Announced

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The Anchorage Alaska Temple was one of the first three temples announced in 1997 after President Gordon B. Hinckley introduced the new, smaller temple concept.

When President Brigham Young in 1863 foretold there one day would be hundreds of temples built and dedicated to the Lord (see Discourses of Brigham Young, p. 395), it no doubt seemed incredible to the relatively small flock that belonged to the Church then.

By 1997, when the 50th operating temple of the Church was dedicated in St. Louis, Missouri, President Young's prophecy seemed much closer to fruition. But something happened that year—two decades ago—that gave a revolutionary impetus to temple building few at the time could have imagined. It might be difficult today to recall the sensation it created, but with 20 years' perspective, it is easy to look back and gauge the impact.

In June 1997, President Gordon B. Hinckley had attended the centennial observance of the Church's Juarez Academy in Mexico and was on his way to an airport for a flight home to Salt Lake City.

In a Church News interview reported August 1, 1998, he recounted: "As we were riding to El Paso, I reflected on what we could do to help these people in the Church colonies in Mexico. They've been so very faithful over the years. ... And yet, they've had to travel all the way to Mesa, Arizona, to go to a temple."

It was then that the concept of smaller temples came to the Church President's mind.

"I concluded we didn't need the laundry. We didn't need to rent temple clothing. We didn't need eating facilities. These have been added for the convenience of the people but are not necessary [for the temple ordinances]."

All necessary features of a temple could be incorporated into a smaller structure constructed with relative rapidity, just a few months, he reflected. On a piece of paper, he sketched out a floor plan that he later turned over to architects to refine.

By October general conference of that year, the prophet-leader was ready not only to introduce the design concept to the Church membership but to announce that temples would be built according to it in three areas of the Church.

They would be built to temple standards, which are much higher than meetinghouse standards. They would accommodate baptisms for the dead, the endowment service, sealings, and all other ordinances to be had in the Lord's house for both the living and the dead.

"They would be presided over, wherever possible, by local men called as temple presidents, just as stake presidents are called," he explained in the conference priesthood session.

"Patrons would be expected to have their own temple clothing, thereby making unnecessary the construction of very costly laundries. A simple laundry would take care of baptismal clothing. There would be no eating facilities.

"These structures would be open according to need, maybe only one or two days a week—that would be left to the judgment of the temple president. Where possible, we would place such a building on the same grounds as the stake center, using the same parking lot for both facilities, thereby effecting a great savings."

One such smaller temple could be constructed for about the same cost it took just to maintain a large temple in a single year, he noted. And ordinance workers would themselves maintain the smaller temples, thus further reducing costs.

The first three such temples, he announced, would be built in Anchorage, Alaska; in the LDS colonies in northern Mexico; and in Monticello, Utah.

More of the traditional temples would be built elsewhere, he explained, "but we are developing plans that will reduce the costs without any reduction in terms of the work to be performed



Provo City Center Temple.

therein. We are determined, brethren, to take the temples to the people and afford them every opportunity for the very precious blessings that come of temple worship."

As if to underscore the import of this development, President Hinckley at the following general conference in April 1998 announced an ambitious goal: effective immediately construction would commence on some 30 of what he called "small, beautiful, serviceable temples" in Europe, Asia, Australia, Fiji, Mexico, Central and South America, and Africa, as well as the United States and Canada.

With 17 temples then going forward, that would total 47 new temples in addition to the 51 then in operation, he pointed out. He added, "I think we had better add two more to make it an even 100 by the end of this century, being 2,000 years 'since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh' (D&C 20:1). In this program we are moving on a scale the like of which we have never seen before."

The 100-temple goal was reached on October 1, 2000, when President Hinckley dedicated the Boston Massachusetts Temple.

Meanwhile, temple construction proliferated with such rapidity for a while that some months saw the dedication of several temples; sometimes there were two or three a week.

In addition to the introduction of smaller, less-costly temples, a number of noteworthy milestones mark the past 20-year period of temple building.

Among them, certainly, was the construction of temples at sites of great historic import to the Church of Jesus Christ in this dispensation.

The Palmyra New York Temple was dedicated April 6, 2000, on the 170th anniversary of the organization of the Church at the most sacred site in its history, where God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to the 14-year-old Prophet Joseph Smith, ushering in the Restoration.

In a then-unprecedented move, proceedings of the first dedicatory temple session in Palmyra were carried to approximately 1,300 stake centers and other facilities in the United States and Canada, which, for the purpose of the dedication, each became a temporary extension of the temple.

The precedent would be followed on April 22, 2001, with the dedication of the Winter Quarters Nebraska Temple outside Omaha, next to a pioneer cemetery with the interred remains of more than 325 of the Mormon pioneers who died while encamped there during the 1846-47 exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the valley of the Great Salt Lake.

As with the dedication in Palmyra, proceedings of the first session of the Winter Quarters Temple were carried by satellite to Church meetinghouses in North America.

And as a memorial to the Prophet Joseph Smith, President Hinckley dedicated a reconstructed Nauvoo Illinois Temple on June 27, 2002, with three other days of dedication to follow. The Church President planned the first dedicatory session to coincide with the exact calendar day and hour that the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were martyred at nearby Carthage, Illinois, 158 years earlier.

The event in Nauvoo was the first temple dedicatory session to be broadcast by satellite internationally.

Built on the precise footprint of the former temple, which was desecrated by mobs and later destroyed after the Latter-day Saints were driven from Nauvoo in 1846, the new temple was

constructed according to the original exterior architecture. Even so, it was smaller than some traditional temples. Arguably, President Hinckley set the stage for construction of the temples at Palmyra, Winter Quarters, and Nauvoo by establishing the thinking that smaller, less-costly temples could be built in some locales.

The smaller temple design made its mark, among other places, in Latin America, commencing with the 1999 dedication of the Colonia Juarez Chihuahua Temple. Prior to then, there was only one temple in Mexico (the Mexico City Temple). Since the 1999 dedication, 11 other temples have opened in Mexico. Today there are 13 in operation, making Mexico a true "nation of temples."

Though it was already nearing completion, the first temple to be dedicated after President Hinckley's momentous 1997 announcement, the Vernal Utah Temple, is consistent with a pattern of outside-the-box thinking with regard to building temples that marked this period. Dedicated November 2, it is the first of three temples in the Church to be built from an existing structure. In this instance it was the pioneer-era Uintah Stake Tabernacle constructed from 1898 to 1907.

That would happen again two years later when construction commenced on the Copenhagen Denmark Temple, renovated from the existing Priorvej Chapel, which had been dedicated by Elder John A. Widtsoe of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on June 14, 1931. The temple was dedicated on May 23, 2004.

And a tragic event had a triumphal end with the dedication March 20, 2016, of the Provo City Center Temple, the second temple for that city. In the wee hours of December 17, 2010, a fire destroyed the iconic Provo Tabernacle, which had been in use since 1886 and was dedicated in 1898. The blaze left only charred walls standing.

Grief turned to joy when, at general conference on October 1, 2011, President Thomas S. Monson announced the structure would be rebuilt to serve as a temple. Salvaging a temple from the charred ruins of a dedicated house of worship thus was a literal application of the phrase in Isaiah 61:3, "to give unto them beauty for ashes."

The Provo City Center Temple is the 150th in the Church, and the 100th to be dedicated since President Hinckley felt inspired in 1997 to conceive a smaller temple design and act on that inspiration promptly, setting the stage to move temple building forward on an unprecedented scale.

Today, as the Church looks forward to the dedication of the Paris France Temple on May 21 and the rededication of the renovated Idaho Falls Idaho Temple on June 4, there are 155 operating temples, three under renovation, 11 under construction, and 11 announced. The Church is thus within a couple dozen temples of seeing the fulfillment of Brigham Young's prophecy of hundreds of temples.

All of this is consistent with the sentiment President Hinckley expressed in April 1998: "If temple ordinances are an essential part of the restored gospel, and I testify that they are, then we must provide the means by which they can be accomplished. ... The temple ordinances become the crowning blessings the Church has to offer."



Winter Quarters Nebraska Temple.

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