



EPILOGUE

LATTER-DAY SAINT MISSIONARY EFFORTS IN SOUTH AMERICA, 1948–2018

EFFECTS OF THE RICHARDESSES' VISIT

Elder Stephen L Richards's 1948 tour marked the end of South America's longest period (twenty-two years) without an official visit by one of the presiding authorities. South American Latter-day Saints and missionaries personally learned from interacting with an Apostle, and Elder Richards's observations and impressions influenced the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve for many years. Indeed, Church leadership took notice and continued to "look southward."

In Uruguay, President Williams created ten branches during 1948. In the Argentine Mission a new mission home was approved. Brazilian Mission president Harold Rex reported that missionary performance increased, the Mutual Improvement Association was organized, and more young adults joined the church. A surge in baptisms revealed the impact the visiting Apostle had on the missionaries. The *Church News* noted: "One month later one of the largest baptismal services in Brazilian Mission history was held in Joinville. The spirit of the work was felt, and many districts held their first baptisms in many months. The district of São

Paulo counted forty baptisms as the year ended.”¹ Missionary work then extended to Paraguay with its first convert baptism.²

As chairman of the Church’s missionary committee, Elder Richards gained a better vision of the Church’s needs and operation in South America. In the 1940s, only 7 percent of the missionary force were called to serve in Latin America; the majority of missionaries labored in the United States and Europe. However, the number of missionaries called to Latin America rose steadily during the years following the Richardses’ visit, surpassing 10 to 16 percent by the 1970s.³

DEDICATION OF CENTRAL AMERICA

Missionaries were introduced to Central America in 1947. For the next few years, the Mexican Mission assigned missionaries to Guatemala and then to surrounding countries. In 1952 Elder Spencer W. Kimball of the Quorum of the Twelve and Elder Bruce R. McConkie, an Assistant to the Twelve, arrived in Central America to make final preparations to create a new mission. Over the course of a week, Elders Kimball and McConkie visited six Central American countries. Government officials were welcoming and encouraging. On November 15, 1952, Elder Kimball phoned President McKay and received permission not only to create the Central American Mission, as planned, but also to dedicate Central America for proselytizing.⁴

From Guatemala City, Elder Spencer W. Kimball offered a prayer for all of Central America on November 16, 1952. Aspects of the prayer paralleled the prophesied growth foreseen by Elder Ballard when he blessed the South American continent in 1925. Elder Kimball prayed:

Gracious Father, we thank Thee for the repeated assurance through Thy prophets that these scattered remnants of Israel on this continent, the choicest of all lands, would be brought to the knowledge of Thee and Thy program and be permitted to hear the gospel. . . . Bless, we pray Thee, the missionary work in all the world but today we ask Thy special blessings upon the Lamanite cause and ask that the seed of Lehi in these Central American countries and the gentiles among them may see and hear and understand and have

the courage and fortitude to accept and live the exalting program of Thy divine gospel. . . . Let them [the Saints] blossom as the rose upon the mountains, and let them be converted, “a nation in a day” and let Thy work be glorified and Thy people receive the promised blessings.⁵

With the opening of the Central American Mission, the Church’s ensign moved beyond Mexico and was carried as far south as Panama.

THE FIRST VISIT BY A CHURCH PRESIDENT

David O. McKay, the most internationally traveled of all modern Apostles at the time, became Church President in 1951. He called his long-time friend and associate Stephen L. Richards as his first counselor and J. Reuben Clark Jr. as second counselor.

Several years before becoming Church President, President McKay received invitations to visit South America from his son Robert McKay, who served as a missionary in Argentina, and mission president Frederick S. Williams. The opportunity finally came when President McKay announced in 1954 he would journey to London, South Africa, and then Latin America. Six years had passed since Elder Richards’s tour, and no Apostles had traveled to South America in the interim. This was the first time a President of the Church would visit South America, whose Latter-day Saint population totaled about two thousand members by the year’s end.⁶

President McKay met with Church members in Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina as well as in other South and Central American countries, including Chile, Peru, Panama, Guatemala, and, later that year, Mexico. President McKay penned his impressions of his trip: “I came to South America with the feeling that there would be plenty of opposition to the Church. I go away feeling that all the people need is a better understanding of the Church and its teachings. These are great countries.”⁷ After President McKay’s trip, the First Presidency and the Twelve began visiting Latin America on a regular basis—almost yearly.

The opening of Chile began in June 1952, when Billie Fotheringham met with President Stephen L Richards in the Church Administration Building in Salt Lake City. Fotheringham had just accepted a job in Chile and wanted permission to hold church services in Santiago. President Richards gave permission and asked Fotheringham to keep in contact about his experiences.⁸ Two years later, President McKay dined with the Fotheringhams during his 1954 tour of South America.

In 1956, just over one hundred years after Apostle Parley P. Pratt visited Chile,⁹ formal permission was granted to start missionary work, and two missionaries from neighboring Argentina were assigned to serve there.¹⁰ The Santiago Branch was formally organized on July 5, 1956.¹¹ Later that year, the first six Chilean converts were baptized.¹²

Peru's beginnings coincided with Chile's. When President McKay visited Peru in 1954, a group of Americans were meeting together, but they were not organized into a branch. The creation of the Lima Branch was authorized July 1956, the same month the Santiago Branch in Chile was organized. Missionaries from the Uruguayan Mission were soon transferred to Peru and arrived in August 1956.¹³ Elder Henry D. Moyle of the Twelve also met with government officials and began the process of legal recognition for the Church, which was finalized two years later.¹⁴

EXPANDING MISSIONS IN SOUTH AMERICA

President Richards passed away in May 1959. Though he never returned to South America after his 1948 tour, his pioneering efforts were rewarded as growth and progress continued in lands he came to love.

The cause of South America was taken up by Elder Spencer W. Kimball. He ushered in 1959 by spending eleven weeks in South America. Typical of his remarkable work ethic, he traveled thirty-five thousand miles, visited six countries, and held more than one hundred meetings. He recorded that he visited most of the nine thousand members of South America and recommended to the Twelve the creation of new missions along the west coasts of Peru and Chile.¹⁵ He also suggested dividing the Brazilian Mission and believed that stakes were in South America's near

future.¹⁶ In his official report in April 1959, Elder Kimball said, “The statement of Horace Greeley, ‘Go west, young man, go west’ should be changed to ‘Go south, young man, go south.’” He then commented in his report to the First Presidency, “We are but scratching the surface in our work in this land.”¹⁷

On November 1, 1959, Elder Harold B. Lee of the Twelve formally organized the Andes Mission in Lima, Peru, with Frederick S. Williams translating at the meeting. Williams recorded:

Elder Lee himself became prophetic, and I, standing at his side as interpreter, felt the deep spiritual context of his word. He stated that the time would soon come when Father Lehi’s children would be inspired to accept the Book of Mormon and enter the Church in great numbers. “Soon,” he said, “The Pacific Coast of the Americas will become the most fertile proselyting field of the Church.”¹⁸

The new Andes Mission president was J. Vernon Sharp, who had served as a young missionary in Argentina during the 1920s and had been present at Elder Ballard’s dedication and acorn-to-oak-tree prophecy. Returning to South America more than thirty years later and entrusted with responsibility for the Church’s progress in Peru and Chile, President Sharp began building on the aspirations that both Elders Pratt and Ballard had for these countries.

Growth began quickly in Lima, but President Sharp felt divided as he balanced his time with three weeks in Peru followed by three weeks in Chile. In 1960 Joseph Fielding Smith, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and Elder A. Theodore Tuttle of the First Council of the Seventy toured the mission and recommended its division, which occurred in 1961 with the formation of the Chilean Mission, allowing Sharp to focus exclusively on Peru.

Continuing on the foundation began in Lima, Sharp started a branch in Cuzco, the ancient Incan capital.¹⁹ President Sharp’s successor, Sterling Nicolaysen, worked with Elder Tuttle to engage and understand the indigenous people, who struggled with their identity in a very Spanish- and European-style world.²⁰ Latter-day Saint missionaries also needed to adapt as they learned indigenous languages and worked with unique native cultures. Nevertheless, more than a century after Parley P. Pratt’s

mission, the Latter-day Saint gospel was beginning to reach the “Lamanites” of South America.²¹

ELDER THEODORE A. TUTTLE, GENERAL AUTHORITY SUPERVISOR

Back in 1947, President Frederick S. Williams made a request to the First Presidency that a General Authority be “called to live in South America to supervise and coordinate the activity of the various missions after they were established.”²² Elder Theodore A. Tuttle’s involvement in the work in South America fulfilled that request. From 1960 to 1965, Elder Tuttle lived in South America with all missions reporting to him as president of the conglomerate South American Mission. Having a General Authority on the ground helped unify and correlate the work of the separate missions. Also, as some missionaries concluded their missions and journeyed home, Elder Tuttle sent them to visit Ecuador and Colombia on fact-finding trips so he could get a report on whether those countries were ready for proselytizing.²³

On June 28, 1962, the first portion of a seminar for South American mission presidents was held at the Incan ruins at Machu Picchu, Peru, with all six mission presidents, their wives, and Elder and Sister Tuttle in attendance.²⁴ The great vista and stronghold of the past Incan civilization rejuvenated the leaders, leaving them in awe of the past and determined to shape the future of Latin America in a positive manner. The rest of the seminar took place in Lima. Elder Tuttle’s direction and Uruguayan Mission president J. Thomas Fyans’s plan called the “Six Steps to Stakehood” gave vision and a concrete path for leaders to prepare districts to become stakes.²⁵

Another change in May 1965 showed further administrative development. Along with their other responsibilities, members of the Quorum of the Twelve were assigned as area supervisors to directly oversee missions in each part of the world. Elder Spencer W. Kimball was assigned to South America for the next three years.²⁶ He worked closely with Elders Tuttle and Franklin D. Richards²⁷ in touring the countries and prepared to open more.²⁸

DEDICATION OF ECUADOR AND BEGINNINGS IN BOLIVIA, COLOMBIA, AND VENEZUELA

With President George Albert Smith's authorization, Elder Kimball traveled to Quito, Ecuador, and in the early evening of October 9, 1965, dedicated the country for Latter-day Saint missionary work. The rain had just stopped on a hill overlooking Quito, and the missionaries invited an Ecuadorian family visiting the spot to join them, along with two cab drivers. Elder Kimball said of the event: "As these nine Lamanite souls stood before me in the dedication prayer, I seemed to see them standing there representing the Lamanite nations, all Lamanites—the little ones, the youth, the parents and other adults. I seemed to feel a multitude of nations reaching for something heretofore unobtainable, listening for a familiar voice. I seemed to hear the chanting voice of millions, trying to bring back that which was lost; an urgent, plaintive pleading for something lost centuries ago."²⁹ Recounting what he foresaw, he wrote, "The gospel will eventually work miracles, putting shoes on their bare, calloused feet, food in their hungry stomachs, to make their tiny, diminutive bodies full size, clothes on their burdened backs, homes comfortable and luxurious ones for them."³⁰

Elder Kimball noted that in 1964, one thousand missionaries were baptizing one thousand people a month in the seven missions of South America. As part of the trip, he also traveled to Bolivia, where the Church received legal recognition and missionaries at the end of the year.³¹ In 1968 former Brazilian Mission president Harold Rex helped start the Church in Bogotá, Colombia, including witnessing Elder Kimball's dedication of that country. Then in 1966 the Church expanded south to Venezuela under the direction of Central American Mission president Ted E. Brewerton.

THE FIRST STAKES

Elder Tuttle had great hopes that the first stake would be established in Montevideo, Uruguay, and chose to live there as he supervised the work on the continent. He admired the country's stability and felt that its central location between Argentina and Brazil was ideal. He also purchased

land for a mission home and what decades later became the Montevideo Uruguay Temple.³²

In 1964 Elder Kimball proposed to the Quorum of the Twelve that a Uruguayan stake be created, but it was not approved. Elder Kimball told Uruguayan Mission president Fyans, “Some of the Brethren have been quite opposed to the creation of stakes in foreign countries until there is a great maturity on the part of the local people.”³³ Not only did the first stake in South America not materialize in Uruguay, but the growth of the country never matched that of Brazil or Argentina, disqualifying Uruguay from being a hub for the Church in South America.

Ever determined to create stakes, Elder Kimball made sure the stronger districts were functioning like stakes during his visits to Argentina, Uruguay, and especially Brazil in 1965. Then in October 1965 he proposed at a meeting of the Twelve that a stake be organized in São Paulo, Brazil. At the time there were about twenty stakes outside North America. To Elder Kimball’s delight, the First Presidency approved the measure.³⁴

The dam had been opened. In spring 1966 the São Paulo Stake was organized, closely followed that autumn by the Buenos Aires Stake. Elder Kimball returned to Uruguay in November 1967 to organize the Montevideo Stake. Now three of the countries visited by Elder Richards had their first stakes. Peru reached stakehood not long after, in 1970.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

It was during the trips in the 1960s to organize the first stakes in South America, particularly to Brazil, that Elder Kimball recorded an impression about the next major step for the Church. Elder Kimball “felt temples could be built in South America.”³⁵ Just a few years later, he played a pivotal role in the realization of that prompting.

President Kimball arrived in São Paulo in 1975 to conduct an area conference. Almost ten years had passed since he created the first stakes on the continent. He shocked the Latter-day Saints with a special announcement: “Subject to the conditions that exist and your total cooperation, we will build the seventeenth temple of the Lord in this country of South America, and it will be located in São Paulo, Brazil.”³⁶

With the temple announcement, President Kimball challenged Latter-day Saints throughout the continent to raise money and contribute to the building of the temple.³⁷ Members of the Church also focused on qualifying to enter the temple by bringing their lives in conformity with the Church's teachings. Later during his time as Church President, Spencer W. Kimball announced additional Latin American temples for Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Argentina, and Chile, all of which were dedicated in the 1980s.

Christmas Day in 1975 marked fifty years from when Elder Melvin J. Ballard dedicated South America. Statistics as of January 1, 1976, showed Latter-day Saint membership for Mexico at 175,806; Central America at 39,207; South America at 177,860; and the Caribbean at 1,064. The totals for these areas combined was 393,937, or 11 percent of a 3.5 million worldwide Church membership.³⁸

REMOVING BARRIERS

For decades President Kimball and other Latter-day Saint Apostles had prayed about removing the restriction on priesthood and temple blessings for members of African descent, a practice that began in the 1850s in the United States amid racial and cultural conflicts of that era.³⁹ One of the hallmarks of Spencer W. Kimball's presidency was his announcement in June 1978 that members of all races who are worthy could receive priesthood and temple blessings.

The official telegram came with the announcement on Saturday, June 10, 1978, and Elder Mark E. Petersen stopped to share his thoughts. One man remembered it this way:

Elder Petersen proceeded to tell us what the process had been like for the preceding several months. He mentioned the long discussions in the upper rooms of the Temple, the question of whether or not [it] was time, their studying of every statement ever given by any of the previous prophets or members of the First Presidency, and the many earnest prayers in sacred places. Then he told us that the world would think that this change was being made for political reasons, to avoid embarrassment for LDS people running for

political office, or to promote proselyting efforts. He said that was not the case, and reminded us of the difficulty in determining who in that country could receive the Priesthood. That struck a chord with me because of similar difficulties we had experienced in Peru and Ecuador to determine who could receive the Priesthood. Elder Peterson told us that the issue of determining who could receive the blessings of the temple in Brazil had motivated the discussions regarding who could hold the Priesthood.”⁴⁰

The revelation arrived just months before the São Paulo Temple dedication in October 1978. Brazilians whose lineage previously might have disqualified them from temple attendance no longer had to worry. The announcement threw open the floodgates for continued Church growth in Brazil and even more so in Africa and the Caribbean.

GROWTH IN THE CARIBBEAN

Latter-day Saint missionaries could now labor among the thirty million people living in the Caribbean, which was highly populated with descendants of African slaves. By the end of 1978, missionaries arrived in the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, and Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Seventy dedicated these lands for their work.⁴¹ Missions covered most of the Caribbean by 1985, except for Cuba. No Caribbean isle of the sea proved more fertile than the Dominican Republic, which grew to one thousand Church members in five years, eleven thousand by 1986, and then to eighty thousand by the time of the dedication of the first Caribbean temple in 2000.⁴² As of 2017, there were 135,000 Latter-day Saints in that country alone and more than 20,000 in neighboring Haiti, where a temple was announced in the Church’s April 2015 general conference.

MORE LATINO MISSIONARIES CALLED

Though the maturation of several first-generation leaders was evident by their calls to the presiding councils of the Church, President Kimball was particularly concerned about the calling of native missionaries. In a historic talk to the regional representatives of the Church in 1974, Presi-

dent Kimball requested more missionaries, expressing the need for each country to have a full complement of native missionaries so that other countries could be opened to the Church and its teachings.⁴³

In the mid-1970s Elder W. Grant Bangerter of the Seventy worked with local leaders in Brazil to change the perception that Brazilians were precluded from missionary service because their academic obligations could not be interrupted for two years. One poignant moment came as Elder Bangerter heard José Lombardi, the first patriarch in South America, state that a declaration in patriarchal blessings he'd given was that young men were to go on missions. Elder Bangerter raised the vision of priesthood leaders to see that the Lord had already directed their young men to serve missions and that the prophet was calling for their enlistment.⁴⁴ In 1978, as the dedication of the São Paulo Temple arrived, only twenty-five hundred of the fifth thousand Latter-day Saint men in Brazil had been ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood—a requirement for entering the temple. Elder Bangerter made it a goal for ten thousand men to receive the priesthood.⁴⁵ He taught priesthood leaders about the long-term benefits of missionary service, explaining, “If we do not call these native young men and women . . . , there will not be adequate leadership for the rapid growth of the Church, which is now taking place. . . . The calling of local missionaries will provide a fountain of men from which we can draw future leaders.”⁴⁶

In a pivotal meeting, a high councilor in the Bosque Stake in Brazil asked all the bishops and elders quorum presidents to get on their knees and pray until the Spirit told them which young men were ready for missions. Then they were to get up and go get those young men and bring them back to be interviewed right then for missions. Through such efforts, Elder Bangerter reached his initial goal of 360 Brazilian missionaries that he had promised President Kimball.⁴⁷ A generation of native Latter-day Saints began to answer the call of the prophet, which helped the Church prepare for a time of great growth in the 1980s.

LATIN AMERICAN GENERAL AUTHORITIES

The Church's 1981 general conference marked the call of the first Latin American General Authority: Argentinian Ángel Abrea of the First

Quorum of the Seventy. The second Latin American General Authority was called in 1985, when Brazilian Helio de Rocha Camargo received a call to the Seventy. The Second Quorum of the Seventy was organized by the end of the decade and added Horacio A. Tenorio of Mexico and Helvécio Martins of Brazil to its ranks. Elder Martins was the first Seventy of African descent.⁴⁸

A need for continued General Authority oversight led to a significant administrative change in June 1984: the announcement of area presidencies in thirteen areas worldwide. Three General Authorities of the Church would reside in a given area with a task to direct the work. Leadership from General Authorities provided decentralization of authority from Salt Lake and more opportunity to lead and train members and to manage the areas of the Church.⁴⁹

THE LAST REMAINING COUNTRIES

The 1980s saw both successes and setbacks in Central America. Though Guatemala reached forty thousand members by the time of the dedication of its first temple in 1984, several countries like Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras faced considerable internal strife and civil war, disrupting the Church's expansion there. In 1980 North American missionaries were removed from Honduras, but the mission president sent ten missionaries to open up the English-speaking country of Belize, formerly British Honduras, which had gained its independence from England that year.

In 1988 Church President Ezra Taft Benson felt it was time to move into the last remaining countries in South America.⁵⁰ On the northeastern tip of the continent above Brazil lay the three Guianas: Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana, which were colonies of England, Holland, and France, respectively. General Authorities enlisted senior missionary couples to move to these countries.⁵¹ Through their efforts, the Church took root in each one of these three countries, and in 1991 Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Twelve dedicated them, along with Trinidad and Tobago, for missionary work.⁵² Thus the Church had a presence in every country in South and Central America except one.

A new century finally brought the Church into the last country in Latin America and the Western Hemisphere that did not have an offi-

cial Latter-day Saint presence: Cuba. In 2005 a branch of Church members was organized in Havana, and in 2012 Elder David A. Bednar of the Twelve dedicated the country. Efforts have focused on following the government's guidelines, so there are no proselyting missionaries assigned to the country. Instead, conversions have come through members sharing the Church's teachings with friends. These efforts led to the creation of a second branch in 2014.⁵³

CHALLENGES OF GROWTH

The wave of Latin American growth in the 1980s and 1990s provided huge challenges for the burgeoning Church. President Hinckley told reporters that "the most serious yet exciting challenge was that of managing growth."⁵⁴ The Church grew so fast that the long-prophesied mighty oak tree seemed to have developed overgrown boughs and branches in some places. Many stopped attending church. President Hinckley admonished the Saints, "The days are past, the days are gone, the days are no longer here when we will baptize hundreds of thousands of people . . . and then they will drift away from the Church. When you begin to count those who are not active, you are almost driven to tears over the terrible losses we have suffered."⁵⁵

To combat this challenge of retention, President Hinckley assigned Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Twelve to serve as an area president in Chile for two years. Over the course of Elder Holland's service, he and his counselors strengthened Church members and challenged them to greater activity, temple attendance, and retention. They consolidated units so priesthood leadership wasn't spread too thin and a stronger foundation could be built.⁵⁶ They also trained local leaders to more effectively serve as shepherds for the rapidly growing membership.⁵⁷

Another challenge facing the Church was how to better administer the work. In the 1990s area presidencies faced the daunting task of addressing needs in areas with hundreds of thousands of members. In 1995 President Hinckley released the regional representatives of the Church and created the calling of area authority. Two years later, he made these men Seventies, increasing the Quorums of the Seventy to eight by 2005. By expanding the role of the Seventy to men called to serve in their local

region and to coordinate efforts with a group of stakes, the Church could grow but still stay decentralized.

A TEMPLE-BUILDING PEOPLE

Maturing membership and leadership enabled another expansion in the Church. Feeling inspired while in Colonia Juárez, Mexico, President Hinckley traced a plan for a very basic temple on a piece of paper that he carried with him back to Salt Lake. In the October 1997 general conference, President Hinckley announced a small-temple concept and proposed that temples be built as an experiment with the new design in Colonia Juárez; Anchorage, Alaska; and Monticello, Utah. Further, in the April 1998 general conference, President Hinckley proposed that the Church build thirty-two temples with a goal of having one hundred in operation by the end of 2000, ushering in a frenzy of temple building.⁵⁸

Latin America benefited greatly in this effort. Mexico's temples grew from just one in Mexico City, dedicated in 1983, to nine in 2000, and then to thirteen completed and one announced in 2018. Brazil's temples expanded to eleven by 2018, with three announced and two under construction. Countries that received temples for the first time included Colombia (1999), Ecuador (1999), the Dominican Republic (2000), Bolivia (2000), Costa Rica (2000), Venezuela (2000), Uruguay (2001), Paraguay (2002), Panama (2008), El Salvador (2011), and Honduras (2013). Temples for Nicaragua and Puerto Rico were announced in 2018. Between 2010 and 2018, additional temples were dedicated, were being constructed, or were announced for Peru, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Guatemala. And in the April 2016 general conference, a second temple was announced for Lima, Peru, making it the first city in the world outside Utah to have two temples in one city.⁵⁹

Of course, the explosion in temple building was a result of the Church's population growth. At the turn of the twenty-first century, total membership was 2.4 million in South America and 3.5 million for all of Latin America—almost a third of the Church's worldwide population.⁶⁰ Three countries passed the mark of one hundred stakes: Mexico (1989), Brazil (1993), and Peru (2013).⁶¹ Mexico reached one million members in 2004, and Brazil followed in 2007.⁶²

The story of the Church in Latin America would not be complete without mention of the many branches and wards formed for Spanish-speaking members throughout the United States.

Spanish-speaking members first started gathering in the United States in November 1920, when Mexican members started to meet in Salt Lake City. They became known as the Mexican Branch and then the Lucero Ward.⁶³ In 1936 the Spanish American Mission, which had boundaries from California to Texas, was the only mission of its kind within the United States.⁶⁴

As of January 2016, 780 Spanish-speaking units were present in forty-one of the fifty states, with high concentrations of branches in California, Utah, Arizona, Texas, and Florida. Spanish units were formed usually as part of English-speaking stakes. As of 2018, three all-Spanish-speaking stakes were in California and one in Texas.⁶⁵

With such a large portion of Latin Americans in the United States, Church leaders have organized some events to better celebrate the Latin Latter-day Saint community and pay tribute to their contributions throughout the world. In 2005 Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve hosted a meeting of Latino Saints in the Church's Conference Center in Salt Lake City. The meeting commemorated the 175th anniversary of the Church, and Elder Ballard reflected on the eighty years since his grandfather Elder Melvin J. Ballard dedicated South America. Elder Ballard quoted the acorn-to-oak-tree prophecy and stated, "A miracle has been fulfilled." He explained that the South American Mission had grown to seventy missions on the continent and that Latin America included 5.5 million Church members who attended twenty-eight temples.⁶⁶ A celebration of the ninetieth anniversary of Elder Melvin J. Ballard's dedicatory prayer was held in 2015, heralded with a historical marker placed in Tres de Febrero Park in Buenos Aires.

Perusal of the *Church News* in 2015 and any year thereafter shows stories of the members of the Quorum of the Twelve visiting South America frequently—practically every month or two. Never again will the Church see a dearth of apostolic mission tours and visits such as the

twenty-two-year span between Elder Melvin J. Ballard's departure in 1926 and Elder Stephen L Richards's arrival in 1948.

CONCLUSION

Elder Stephen L Richards's apostolic tour as shown through the documents in this book captured a bygone pioneer era. Apostles no longer travel by boat and spend three months doing a single mission tour, but rather travel by airplane or broadcast their messages around the world through communications technology. Gone are the days of counting members by the hundreds. Fledgling branches have been replaced by strengthening stakes that are part of even larger million-member areas of the Church. A mature, global church has emerged.

In 2018 Church President Russell M. Nelson called the first Latin American Apostle, Elder Ulisses Soares. When Elder Soares made his first apostolic trip to South America in 2018, he traveled home to Brazil. Fittingly, his senior companion was President M. Russell Ballard, grandson of Elder Melvin J. Ballard.⁶⁷ *Church News* writer Jason Swensen referenced Elder Melvin J. Ballard's 1925 dedication when he described Latin America's growth:

Almost a century has passed since a latter-day apostle, Elder Melvin J. Ballard, prophesied that South America "is to be a power in the Church."

Since that time, millions, from Colombia to Argentina and several nations in between, have joined the Church. Temples dot the continent. Hundreds of stakes have been formed.

It's tempting to say Elder Ballard's words are fulfilled.

But such a comment would be only a half-truth. The prophecy of South America, according to one of Elder Ballard's apostolic successors, *continues* to be fulfilled. Its true power has yet to be realized.

South America "is the setting for one of the leading extended congregations in the Church and will continue to be so," said Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. "Much of the present and the future Church growth will focus on all of Latin America."⁶⁸

Indeed, Latin Americans have become an integral part of the maturing Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

NOTES

1. Joseph M. Heath, "Brazilian Elders Take Stock of Year's Labors," *Church News*, January 12, 1948, 20.
2. See Frederick S. Williams and Frederick G. Williams, *From Acorn to Oak Tree: A Personal History of the Establishment and First Quarter Century Development of the South American Missions* (Fullerton, CA: Et Cetera, Et Cetera Graphics, 1987), 250–51, 253.
3. See Gordon Irving, "Numerical Strength and Geographical Distribution of the LDS Missionary Force, 1830–1974," *Task Papers in LDS History*, no. 1 (Salt Lake City: CHL, 1975), 21.
4. See Spencer W. Kimball, *Journal*, November 5–16, 1952, CHL.
5. "Elder Spencer W. Kimball Dedicates Land of Central America as a Mission," *Church News*, December 13, 1952, 5, 6, 13.
6. See Kimball, *Journal*, "Summary of the History of the Argentine Mission."
7. Francis M. Gibbons, *David O. McKay: Apostle to the World, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 338.
8. See Billie F. Fotheringham Oral History, interviewed by Gordon Irving, 1996, 12–13, CHL.
9. See F. LaMond Tullis, "California and Chile in 1851 as Experienced by Parley P. Pratt," *Southern California Historical Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 291–307.
10. See "Chile," *Deseret News 2013 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2013), 455.
11. See "Chile," 455; Mark L. Grover, *A Land of Promise and Prophecy: Elder A. Theodore Tuttle in South America, 1960–1965* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2008), 294.
12. See Carlos Cifuentes, "Official Report of the Santiago Chile Area Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Held in the Teatro Caupolicán in Santiago, Chile 28 February and 1 March, 1977," 2, CHL.
13. See Grover, *Land of Promise and Prophecy*, 239–40.
14. See Grover, *Land of Promise and Prophecy*, 240.

15. See Kimball, Journal, Letter to David O. McKay and Council of the Twelve, April 22, 1959.
16. See Francis M. Gibbons, *Spencer W. Kimball: Resolute Disciple, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 224, 237.
17. Gibbons, *Kimball*, 223.
18. Williams and Williams, *From Acorn to Oak Tree*, 303.
19. See Grover, *Land of Promise and Prophecy*, 246–47.
20. See Grover, *Land of Promise and Prophecy*, 242.
21. See Williams and Williams, *From Acorn to Oak Tree*, for more information on missionary work in Peru.
22. Williams and Williams, *From Acorn to Oak Tree*, 303.
23. See Grover, *Land of Promise and Prophecy*, 253.
24. See Grover, *Land of Promise and Prophecy*, 1–7.
25. See Grover, *Land of Promise and Prophecy*, 23, 172–75.
26. See Gibbons, *Kimball*, 237–39.
27. Richards was an Assistant to the Twelve. His grandfather, Apostle Franklin D. Richards, was a relative of Stephen L Richards.
28. See Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball Jr., *Spencer W. Kimball: Twelfth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977), 354.
29. Kimball, Journal, October 9, 1965.
30. Kimball, Journal, October 9, 1965.
31. See Grover, *Land of Promise and Prophecy*, 254–56.
32. See Grover, *Land of Promise and Prophecy*, 85–87.
33. Gibbons, *Kimball*, 239; Grover, *Land of Promise and Prophecy*, 180–82.
34. See Kimball and Kimball, *Spencer W. Kimball*, 357.
35. Kimball and Kimball, *Spencer W. Kimball*, 358.
36. Spencer W. Kimball, “Official Report of the São Paulo Area Conference, February 28 and March 1–2, 1975,” 2, CHL.
37. See Kimball, “Official Report of the São Paulo Area Conference,” 2.
38. See *Deseret News 1978 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1978), 238, 242–43.
39. See “Race and the Priesthood,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.lds.org/topics>.
40. Allen E. Litster, email message to Clinton D. Christensen, January 7, 2012. In private possession.

41. See Kevin Mortensen, *Witnessing the Hand of the Lord in the Dominican Republic* (Centerville, UT: DR History Project, 2009), 57–61.
42. See Mortensen, *Witnessing*, 285.
43. See Spencer W. Kimball, “When the World Will Be Converted,” *Ensign*, October 1974.
44. See W. Grant Bangerter, “*These Things I Know*”: *The Autobiography of William Grant Bangerter*, comp. Cory W. Bangerter (Provo, UT: BYU Print Services, 2013), 248–50.
45. See Bangerter, “*These Things I Know*,” 309.
46. Bangerter, “*These Things I Know*,” 285.
47. See Bangerter, “*These Things I Know*,” 280, 298–99.
48. See Helvécio Martins and Mark Grover, *The Autobiography of Helvécio Martins* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1994).
49. See Tad Walch, “LDS Surge in Latin America,” *Deseret News*, March 21, 2003.
50. See John Limburg, Suriname Mission History, circa. 2002, 1–2, CHL; Benjamin C. and Ruth H. Hudson Oral History, interviewed by Clinton D. Christensen, August 14, 2003, 7–9, 12–13, CHL; Jacqueline Wortham, Family History and Memories of Jacqueline Josephine Adele Ghislaine Cailteur, 2003, 156, 164–66, CHL.
51. See Jacqueline Wortham, Family History, 156, 164–66.
52. See “Services in 3 South American Countries and Island Republic,” *Church News*, March 10, 1990, 3, 10, 13.
53. See Sarah Jane Weaver, “Elder Holland Creates Second Branch in Cuba,” *Church News*, June 19, 2014.
54. Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 3.
55. Walch, “LDS Surge in Latin America.”
56. See *Deseret News 2013 Church Almanac*, 457–58.
57. See Néstor Curbelo, “Conversion and Change in Chile,” *Ensign*, October 2014.
58. See Gordon B. Hinckley, “New Temples to Provide ‘Crowning Blessings’ of the Gospel,” *Ensign*, May 1998.
59. More information on each temple may be found at <https://www.churchofjesuschristtemples.org/>.
60. See *Deseret News 2001–2002 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2000), 576–81. Statistics are as of December 31, 1999.

61. See “Mexico Marks 100-Stake Milestone,” *Ensign*, September 1989; Mark L. Grover, “The Church in Brazil: The Future Has Finally Arrived,” *Ensign*, July 2014; Jason Swensen, “Peruvian Saints Celebrate the Creation of the 100th Stake in Peru,” *Church News*, July 16, 2013.
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64. See Richard O. Cowan, “Spanish-American Mission Group Still Together after 50 Years,” *Deseret News*, March 12, 2010.
65. See Membership information, Church Directory of Organizations and Leaders, CHL. For further study, see also Jessie L. Embry’s *“In His Own Language”*: *Mormon Spanish Speaking Congregations in the United States* (Provo, UT: Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, Brigham Young University, 1997).
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