

# An Apostle Describes a Latter-day Work

By Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

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*The following address was given at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on Thursday, May 26, 2022. See [this page](#) for a summary and photos from the event.*



Thank you. I am honored beyond description to be here with all of you today.

As representatives of the fourth estate, I appreciate your work in relaying the important stories of our day. Sadly, the news of our day is filled with heartache, including the tragic events and the loss of life, most recently in Texas. We mourn with those who mourn, and we pray for all those impacted by this senseless act of violence. My prayer and my blessing is that we will be guided, comforted and helped in our important work, and that victims, families and nations might be granted the peace that surpasses all understanding — the peace that comes from Jesus Christ.

I am humbled that you would take time out of your schedules to be here this afternoon. The last time a senior leader of our Church spoke at the Press Club was in 2000 — [President Gordon B. Hinckley](#). It is good to be back.

I was here in Washington just last month as we opened to the public our temple on the north side of the Capital Beltway. You likely are familiar with this beautiful building; it has been an

iconic landmark in this community for five decades.

Some of you attended the media briefings and tours on April 18. Approximately 150 journalists attended and have provided extensive global coverage. In addition, the package put together by Ed O’Keefe, Ed Forgotston, and their colleagues at CBS Sunday Morning was broadcast on Easter, a most significant day for all Christians.

We were pleased to explain that the temple is not a large cathedral but a series of floors and rooms that symbolically represent a spiritual journey back to the presence of God. As our members move from the ground level to the elevated areas of the structure and receive instruction about God’s plan for His children, the ultimate destination of that symbolic journey is the celestial room, a representation of our heavenly home. So far, hundreds of thousands of people have toured the temple.

If you have not yet had the opportunity to visit the temple, please see me or members of our team after this meeting, and we can arrange your visit.

Last Sunday, I was in Guam to dedicate a new temple in Yigo. The Guam Temple is much different in appearance than the Washington D.C. Temple and noticeably smaller. Yet the sacred rites or ordinances are precisely the same as are performed in all other temples around the world.

Temples are much more than beautiful buildings. The commitments we make in our temple worship help us to see beyond our own self-interest, self-centeredness and selfishness. Our hearts are changed and turn outward as we learn about God's plan for our eternal destiny and happiness. Our love for God grows as we learn about the redeeming role of His Son, Jesus Christ, and our desire to love and serve our brothers and sisters increases.

For those of you who may not be familiar with our church, we believe The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is Christ's New Testament Church restored. The organization of the Church is the same today as existed in the primitive church, with a foundation of apostles and prophets — Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

In the early 1800s, Joseph Smith was a prophet of God through whom the authority and doctrine of the ancient Church were reestablished. By the gift and power of God, he translated an ancient text known as the Book of Mormon, which recounts the visit of Jesus Christ to the Americas and stands with the Bible as a second scriptural witness of the Savior's reality and divinity. We believe that a succession of prophets has continued since Joseph Smith. Today, our prophet is Russell M. Nelson.

Often, the world works from the outside in. Changing a person's circumstances and environment may be considered the best method of changing that person. This approach certainly is important, as I will illustrate in just a few minutes.

But God typically works from the inside out through a spiritual rebirth. If a person allows God to change his or her heart, then that person is empowered in remarkable ways to change his or her circumstances and environment.

Now, both temporal change from the outside in and spiritual change from the inside out are needed and useful in different situations. But we have

learned that a person with a new heart — a person changed from the inside out — serves and blesses family, friends, neighbors, congregations and communities in powerful ways. They learn to see each other for who they are and therefore treat each other accordingly.

This is how our faith community has expanded to all parts of the world, including the Middle East, eastern Asia and eastern Europe. For members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, drawing closer to God through our temple worship is life changing.

You might be interested in some of the questions we have been asked during the temple open house. Some inquiries are focused on our beliefs and the temple, others pertain to the issues of our day — such as the role of women in the Church, race relations and issues pertaining to our LGBTQ members and friends.

Perhaps most often asked is why do we now open the temple if only members can enter after the rededication. The simple answer is that what we do in our temples is not a secret; it is sacred.

And after 50 years of operation, the decommissioning of the Washington D.C. Temple for needed renovations provided an opportunity for us to invite one and all to “come and see,” just as we did during the open house in 1974. We simply want to share with our neighbors and friends some of the things that mean the most to us.

On the issue of women in the Church, our Church membership, like many other organizations, is comprised of a female majority. We have one of the oldest women’s organizations in the world, known as the Relief Society, organized 180 years ago. Today the Relief Society has approximately 7.1 million members.

We have over 31,000 congregations around the world, and each has a local Relief Society president. That’s 31,000 women (and each president has two counselors or assistants — a total of 93,000 women) helping to lead and direct the work of the Church in their local congregations. And this is just one of many examples of how women help to lead the work of the Church. All women and all men in our Church have responsibilities to teach,

minister and serve our brothers and sisters.

On the issue of race, we know and teach that each of us is a beloved son or daughter of God, who loves all of His children equally. Last month, Rev. Dr. Amos Brown spoke at our media events for the Washington D.C. Temple open house. As you may know, Rev. Brown is a prominent civil rights leader and holds a leadership role in the NAACP. He also leads the Third Baptist Church in San Francisco. Though not a member of our faith, he is a tremendous friend of the Church.

In 2019, Derrick Johnson, president and CEO of the NAACP met with President Nelson and took significant steps to bring our organizations together to model for the world how two unexpected organizations can collaborate to foster greater mutual respect and unity. We are working together to support community projects in major U.S. cities, provide academic scholarships for underserved populations, and initiate this summer the first-ever Amos C. Brown Fellowship to support approximately 50 young people for travel to and work in Ghana to gain greater insight into racial harmony.

On the issue of our LGBTQ members and friends, you may be familiar with the Church's 2015 role in passing legislation in Utah to protect LGBTQ individuals from discrimination in housing, employment and other rights. They in turn support securing the freedom of belief that we hold so dear.

And we have continued to build on our accomplishments in Utah. This year, a bill in Arizona was introduced that would provide similar and even expanded protections for LGBTQ people. And we are working with other states on similar initiatives. Such legislation is the result of positive relationships fostered over time.

You also should know that at the federal level, we have been working with our LGBTQ allies to advance legislation of a similar nature.

We are proud to stand with our LGBTQ brothers and sisters — some of whom are with us today — in this important effort. It is hard work and an objective worth fighting for. While we may not agree on everything, we surely are building a foundation of mutual respect and understanding.

Now I again emphasize matters that are sacred to us. We are building

temples all over the world — Chile and Colorado, Guam and Guatemala, Nigeria, New Zealand, and the Netherlands. We have come a long way since the Washington D.C. Temple was dedicated in 1974 — the 16th temple in the Church at that time.

Presently, almost 300 temples are in operation, announced, in design or under construction. President Nelson has announced 100 of those temples in his four very busy years as President of the Church. These beautiful structures are located in 74 countries.

Temples are distinctive from the thousands of our church meetinghouses, or chapels, located around the world. Sunday worship services take place in meetinghouses, as well as youth gatherings, service projects and other community events. All are welcome to join in any and all of these activities.

Temples, once they are dedicated, are reserved for Church members who are prepared to participate in our most sacred rites and ordinances. As I mentioned, these ceremonies lift, inspire, ennoble and change participants as they accept the individual responsibility to follow the

teachings and example of Jesus Christ. Much like the children of Israel with their tabernacle and King Solomon's temple, we are a temple-building and a temple-loving people. And the spiritual promises we make in our temples today are fundamental to changing people from the inside out.

Now let's consider President Hinckley's appearance at this lectern back in 2000 and his pragmatic introduction of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to members of the media. In that year, Church membership "was approaching 11 million." Today, Church membership is almost 17 million worldwide.

We have more than 31,000 congregations. More of our members live outside of the United States than within the United States. Church members speak over 160 languages. While we are growing in the U.S., our greatest expansion presently is occurring in Africa.

We strive to be self-sustaining as a Church, and all of our members are taught temporal and spiritual principles of self-reliance. We experience the same challenges of life that our neighbors do. And we work to successfully navigate those challenges

— to prepare for natural disasters, fires, floods, earthquakes, droughts and typhoons, to prepare for the unexpected accident or injury, loss of employment, career disappointments, and any and all challenges, including those associated with global geopolitical conflicts and war.

We certainly do not have all of the answers, but we do lock arms with the global community to eradicate hunger, administer lifesaving immunizations, provide wheelchair mobility for those who are immobile and train health care professionals to provide physical, mental, and emotional support.

As these examples demonstrate, change also is necessary from the outside in. Generous donations from our Church members, as well as friends of the faith, allow us to support the initiatives I just described — and many others.

Twenty years ago, President Hinckley mentioned that the Church completed 829 humanitarian projects in 101 countries; last year that number was 3,909 projects in 188 countries, and this was just one portion of a comprehensive \$906 million effort to care for those in need. You have on your tables the latest annual

humanitarian report from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I briefly want to provide two examples of initiatives our Church supports.

First, around the world we assist in digging wells and providing clean water, a common and critical need in poorer parts of the world. In many places in Africa, for instance, women devote a considerable amount of time every day procuring and hauling water for home use. In some locations, a woman may need to walk for many hours to and from a well.

My wife, Susan, and I have witnessed the indescribable delight of small children splashing in and drinking clean water from a new well. What may seem commonplace to so many of us is the blessing of a lifetime for so many others and makes it possible for these women to pursue education.

And second, we are assisting with the refugees and those displaced by the conflict in Ukraine, as well as in 27 other neighboring European countries. The Church is supporting multiple organizations, including UN agencies as well as Kyiv Red Cross, in providing items such as shelter, bedding, food, and hygiene and baby supplies.



In 2020 and 2021, in response to supply issues experienced during the pandemic, 2,800 truckloads of commodities from the Church's storehouse system were delivered to nearly 400 food banks, homeless shelters, and other charitable organizations across the U.S. This equated to more than 82 million meals for those in need. Outside of North America, the Church works with local grocery chains to help provide food to members in need.

As an organization, our humanitarian efforts are guided by our commitment to live God's second great commandment: to love our neighbors. We partner with global and other faith-based organizations as they work within an established set of humanitarian principles. This work extends far beyond our Church members, and our volunteers continue to help with cleanup and recovery from disasters for many weeks after the initial event. We remain in place long after media coverage wanes and global volunteers move on to the next emergency.

In 2021, the Church supported 135 mobility projects, such as wheelchairs, in 57 countries and territories; hosted

3,000 blood drives, resulting in 100,000 units donated; and assisted seven major immunization campaigns, including significant financial donations to help UNICEF take COVID-19 immunizations to dozens of countries.

UNICEF works in some of the world's most challenging places to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. The Church has been working with UNICEF to support children and their families for more than 10 years.

A little more than one year ago, the first delivery of COVID-19 immunizations arrived in Accra, Ghana. The Church contributed \$20 million, at the time the largest private-sector donation to UNICEF's ACT Accelerator and COVAX work, to assist with the procurement and supply of what would become a billion vaccine doses to protect frontline health care and social workers and high-risk and vulnerable individuals.

The Church would not be nearly as effective in its humanitarian outreach without volunteers. Last year, Church members donated millions of hours of volunteer service, including labor at Church farms, orchards and canneries;



charitable service projects in 85 countries; and community service projects following natural disasters. The monetary resources that support these projects come from the sacred tithes and offerings of Church members who faithfully live the commandment of tithing, as described in the Old Testament.

**Our Church presently has more than 91,000 missionaries serving around the world,** primarily young men and women. Each is a volunteer, funding the experience individually or with help from family or other members of the Church. Our missionaries help to fulfill the scriptural mandate to “go ye therefore and teach all nations.”

Missionaries teach the gospel of Jesus Christ and help others on their spiritual journey to become more like the Savior. Every missionary learns the life-changing lesson that he or she is part of something greater and more important than self. These women and men are one of the most recognizable features of our Church, as they live among and bless people and communities around the world. We always have been and always will be a missionary-oriented church.

A core tenet of our faith is the importance of education. Many early Church converts in the 1830s were poor and uneducated, and their conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ fueled their desire for learning. Interestingly, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is one of the few religions where the more education you receive, the more committed you are to the religion. Pew Research found over 80% of Latter-day Saint college graduates describe their religion as “very important.”

We give significant attention, energy and resources to educating our youth. All secular and spiritual education fall under the umbrella of our Church Educational System, and nearly 1 million student learners are enrolled.

**We have 60,000 instructors across four university and college campuses and a global online presence in over 180 countries.**

Brigham Young University in Provo, with more than 33,000 students, is the flagship institution. There are two other BYU campuses: one in Rexburg, Idaho (Brigham Young University–Idaho), and another in Laie, Hawaii (Brigham Young University–Hawaii). We also operate Ensign College in

downtown Salt Lake City.

In addition, **BYU-Pathway Worldwide is a fast-growing online education delivery system that serves more than 60,000 students annually** in 188 countries. The largest Latter-day Saint populations enrolled in BYU-Pathway are in the Philippines, Nigeria and Mexico. Certificates and degrees are offered in partnership with BYU-Idaho and Ensign College.

As a Church, we believe that education can lift people both spiritually and temporally, and we have developed BYU-Pathway to ensure our people have access to affordable, high-quality education everywhere in the world.

In 1998, I commented while serving as president of what is now BYU-Idaho that “it will be necessary for us ... to serve ever better the thousands of students we have on campus while simultaneously reaching out to bless the lives of ... thousands ... throughout the world.” This is the vision and purpose of BYU-Pathway Worldwide. We also have **645 of institutes of religion.** These facilities are located adjacent to college and university campuses and provide supplemental education focused on religious studies

and social interaction for young single and married adults.

For youth ages 14–18, we offer a seminary program designed to help students in their study of basic Church doctrine and the scriptures. Many of our youth arise early each day to participate in morning instruction before their regular school classes.

I believe you can see that the Church strives to make education accessible and affordable to all of its members, no matter their background or circumstances.

The Church supports lower tuition costs for Church Educational System programs with an annual financial contribution. As you may know, the U.S. Department of Education publishes the annual financial contributions for institutions of higher education. **For The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the amount last year was more than \$1 billion.** And such contributions have been taking place for decades. Many students who are not of our faith also choose to attend these institutions because of the academic rigor and the values of the students and faculty.

The basic beliefs of our Church fuel the enthusiastic interest of our members in genealogy. Learning about one's ancestors was once reserved for a small, often older population. Today, a hobby has turned into a vast worldwide pursuit.

Records and information once housed on microfilm or in oral histories have now gone digital. We have the largest global collection of records from over 190 countries and territories — and an average of 1.2 million visits on FamilySearch.org every day.

Genealogical enthusiasts may access those records for free at one of our more than 5,400 FamilySearch centers around the world and at our FamilySearch Library in Salt Lake City. More than half of those who visit these satellite libraries are not members of our faith.

We especially focus on helping historically underserved communities. For example, we are helping the African American community discover their enslaved ancestors through collaborations with the National Archives and with the Smithsonian. And we couple those initiatives with our vast effort to

record and preserve oral histories in tens of thousands of villages in Africa. We also host an annual gathering of family history enthusiasts called RootsTech. This global conference is provided free of charge online. This year more than 1,500 class sessions were provided to more than 3.1 million participants to help people of all ages discover their ancestors, share their memories and make meaningful connections.

At Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, we are renovating much of Temple Square, including the iconic temple. This magnificent structure was constructed over a 40-year period in the late 1800s. Crews are working to restore and renovate that sacred edifice, including seismic and structural upgrades. As we have done here in Washington, we will surely invite you to come and see when it is reopened to the public sometime after 2025.

Today, I have tried to describe a few of the things we cherish and strive to do as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I want to address one additional question that you may have. Why do the members of your Church do all these things?

Faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ, is far more than passive belief or assent. Faith in the Savior is a principle of action and of power. Faith is evident in our priorities and how we live.

As we learn and live according to the teachings of Jesus, we are blessed with capacity, power and strength beyond our own. Our hearts are changed, we change from the inside out and we become new creatures in Christ.

To be clear, we do not believe our works save us — far from it. Only the grace of Jesus Christ can enable us to overcome the many negative influences of the world in which live. But our faith does actuate the spiritual responsibility to work, bless and serve. We do not seek blessings only for ourselves. Rather, the blessings we receive enable us to serve other people more efficaciously.

I have highlighted many aspects of our humanitarian outreach efforts around the world. Please remember, however, that we are not primarily a

humanitarian organization. We are the Church of Jesus Christ, reestablished or restored upon the earth in the latter days in preparation for the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We do all of these things because as His disciples we love Him and want to follow His example in our lives.

I conclude by returning to where I began. The basic purpose of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to help people learn about the nature and attributes of God, to love God, to become disciples of His Son Jesus Christ, and to love and serve our brothers and sisters. We believe God can change our hearts and make more of us from the inside out than we can ever make of ourselves. And we also believe that change many times is required from the outside in.

We strive to do both.

Thank you for this chance to speak to you today.

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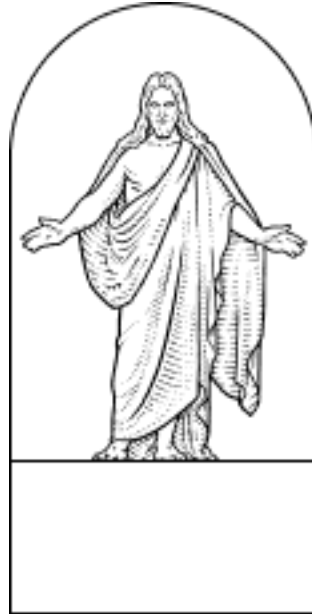
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