

# Brief History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario

Manitoba was the first area in Western Canada to receive missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Missionaries were called to the province as early as 1879, and their efforts were directed to the Icelandic and Mennonite communities.

It was not until 1897 that seven missionaries returned after the organization of the Canadian Mission in Alberta. Initially, their efforts were confined to Winnipeg, Portage la Prairie and Brandon, where Maggie Williams, the first convert in Manitoba, was baptized in June 1897. Others were baptized as well, but all except one family, the De Winters, had emigrated to Alberta or Utah by 1901.

A small congregation—the Winnipeg Branch—was organized in 1910, and by 1914 Church membership had grown sufficiently to merit a chapel at 903 Winnipeg Avenue. However, additional growth in Manitoba was slowed by emigration to Southern Alberta and Utah, as well as by the Depression and World War II, which limited the number of missionaries available. But not so in Northwestern Ontario, which has long had a social and economic connection with Manitoba. In 1924 missionaries were sent to Bergland, a remote community near Lake of the Woods. The Swedish immigrants living in this community had not been visited by missionaries in over ten years yet had remained strong in their faith. By 1925 a thriving branch had been established, and in November 1925 their chapel, built with their own hands, became the second to be dedicated in Western Canada outside of Southern Alberta. In the years since, members from that small, remote congregation have been at the forefront of Church growth throughout the Fort Frances area.

After World War II, the pace of Church growth quickened. In June 1958 Elder Harold B. Lee, later the 11th President of the Church, dedicated a new meetinghouse at 505 Academy Road in Winnipeg. The dedicatory prayer acknowledged the efforts of those who raised money and laboured in the construction and noted that the building would be a great blessing to the people

of Winnipeg—both Latter-day Saints and members of other faiths alike.

The Canada Winnipeg Mission was created in 1976 and included Saskatchewan and Northwestern Ontario. The Winnipeg Manitoba Stake (similar to a diocese) was created in 1978. Since then, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario has grown and matured to become a permanent presence in this region. Church membership doubled from 1,808 in 1980 to 3,660 in 1991. Total membership today is 4,716 in 20 congregations, with most members residing in Winnipeg.

Latter-day Saints in Manitoba strive to be good citizens and join with others to serve in our communities.

One example of this is the annual Winnipeg Harvest Food Drive. This service initiative started in 2005 as a Church event but has expanded over the past 10 years to include the broader community, including local Muslim congregations. Church members also volunteer at Siloam Mission, which makes daily meals and shelter available for the homeless. Church members in Northwestern Ontario cook and serve meals to the homeless every week during the winter as part of a combined interfaith effort called “The Warming House.” Another example of interfaith cooperation is the annual “Prelude to Christmas” performance, where Latter-day Saints join with the Roman Catholic congregation of Mary, Mother of the Church.

As The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues to grow in Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, members work with members of other faith communities, governments and neighbours to strengthen our communities and achieve shared objectives in support of the common good.

