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“When Ye Are Assembled Together:” Congregational Patterns and
Worship Practices of the Early Latter-day Saints 1829-1846

Matthew Jens Johnson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Religious Education

Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

“When Ye Are Assembled Together:” Congregational Patterns and Worship Practices of the Early Latter-day Saints 1829-1846

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The worship experience in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is inextricably linked to the ward or branch. This thesis examines the development of the Latter-day Saint congregation at the church centers from 1829 to 1846: Palmyra and Fayette, New York; Harmony, Pennsylvania; Kirtland, Ohio; Independence, Liberty and Far West in Missouri; and Nauvoo, Illinois. This work not only documents the creation and development of congregations, but also gives attention to the other important elements developed during the early years that are still associated with modern Latter-day Saint wards: meeting and worship patterns, physical locations where meetings took place, and leadership of local branches and wards. More on parameters and purpose is spelled out in Chapter 1.

Each of the next three chapters deals with a time period and place, tracking all four of the elements of emphasis through an era. Chapter 2 briefly discusses meetings and groups before the official organization of the Church, and then continues on to consider the developments made in the three areas considered as Church centers: Fayette and Palmyra in New York and Harmony, Pennsylvania. The bulk of Chapter 2, however, deals with Kirtland, Ohio, which was headquarters for the Church for much of the 1830s.

The three counties in Missouri that held the highest concentration of Saints—Jackson, Clay and Caldwell—are the area of study for Chapter 3. Eventually driven not only from all of these counties but also the state of Missouri, the Saints moved on to Illinois, the subject of Chapter 4. Quincy, Illinois was briefly considered the Church center until the purchase of the land that became Nauvoo. The final chapter synthesizes each of the four topics: congregational organization, meeting patterns, local leadership, and meeting places. Consequently, it is a brief overview of what advancements were made across all years and places studied in each area of focus.

Keywords: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Mormon, congregations, wards, branches, stakes, bishops, branch president, presiding elder, organization, temples, meeting houses, meetings, sacrament, Sabbath, sermons, worship, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Fayette, Kirtland, Missouri, Nauvoo, Palmyra, Independence

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Thanks also to my parents who raised me in an environment of faith and learning. I hope to someday be as well-read and clear-thinking as my dad Paul, and as kind and good as my mom Jill.

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Matthew Jens Johnson

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The first formal meeting of the Church of Christ¹ was on April 6, 1830. With six official members and a few dozen other interested parties and believers, this initial gathering was remarkably humble when compared with the enormous Church today. Much has changed from this single gathering in 1830 to the over 29,000 wards and branches of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that meet weekly in 2013.² While the size and organization seem almost unrecognizable when compared with its beginnings, the modern Church thrives in part because of the commandment as well the inclination of the early Saints to meet together. These led to advancements in all aspects of congregational worship during the first decades of the Church's existence.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the development of the Latter-day Saint congregation at the church centers in Palmyra and Fayette New York³; Kirtland Ohio; Independence, Liberty and Far West in Missouri; and Nauvoo Illinois, from 1829 to

¹ Later renamed "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

² The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Facts and Statistics," Newsroom, accessed June 4, 2013. <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics/>.

³ Harmony, Pennsylvania will also be considered as an early church center in this thesis, though only very brief consideration will be given to Harmony. All of the specific cities listed here may be referred to as the "church centers."

1846. This work will not only document the creation and development of the congregations, but also give attention to the other primary elements developed during those early years that are still associated with modern Latter-day Saint wards: meeting and worship patterns, locations in which the congregations met and the progression in leadership of local branches and wards.

Perhaps each of the four areas of focus--congregational organization, meetings, physical meeting places, and leadership--could have been a useful and interesting study in and of itself; I have chosen to take all of them together in order to give a more complete picture of the Latter-day Saint worship experience during the formative decades of the Church. Following are brief illustrations of why I included each of the four major factors of this thesis.

While modern wards and branches with clearly defined boundaries and policies are very much the accepted standard in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today, this has not always been the case. "Wards" were established in Nauvoo, but were not the same ecclesiastical units that one familiar with the modern Church might assume. For the most part, community-wide meetings dominated the time period from 1829 to 1846, but there were exceptions, including a time in Jackson County where the settlement was split into smaller branches that were to worship together.

I have also chosen to study what the meetings were like when the communities or smaller groups met together. When practicing Latter-day Saints think of their ward,

not only will they call to mind the members in their congregation, but the meetings and other activities they engage in together. The sacrament ordinance, sermons, classes, prayers, music--all of these were important then and now, but were often different in the 1800s when compared with today. The Mormon meetings considered in this thesis adopted familiar patterns from other religious traditions from which the Saints came but also acquired a distinctive flare as a result of the uniqueness of the movement, with its accepted modern revelation.

Another instant connection for today's Latter-day Saints to their ward is the building in which they meet. Indeed, the place where associations with the people of the ward or branch are made is significant. Where the meetings are held is an essential part of the experience. The early Saints had, in their poverty and frequently uprooted condition, nothing like the plentiful, spacious buildings that are commonly taken for granted today. The journals and diaries of many of the early Saints referred to attending their worship services almost universally as "going to meeting."⁴ In my experience, the phrase today is "going to church." While "going to meeting" may have been the phrase used widely at the time, even if they were gathering in a cathedral or sanctuary, the shift from "going to meeting" to "going to church" seems to be at least a

⁴ Benjamin F. Johnson, *Autobiography*, Book of Abraham Project, accessed June 13, 2013, <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/BFJohnson.html>.

subtle reflection on how much having a church building has come to define the worship experience today.

The people in leadership positions in the congregation are another important element that I have chosen to explore. Spontaneous leaders of informal groups to appointed presiding officers over specific areas were significant to the Saints from the beginning, and ward leaders today certainly make an impact on the ward members' worship experience. Leadership is inextricably linked to all of the other parts of congregations that I will explore in this thesis.

A few parameters have focused the scope of this study. The time period is limited to the years 1829 to 1846. Also, only congregations in and directly around the church centers will be studied. Analysis of leadership will be limited to local leadership and general leadership as it pertains to the organization and running of the branches and wards. While sufficient detail will be supplied to demonstrate important changes, practices, and themes related to the congregations—including their meetings and leadership—this thesis is by no means an exhaustive study of each individual congregation at the church centers.

Methodology

Although major church history works contain information regarding Latter-day Saint congregations, this thesis will be a valuable addition to the field as a unique compilation and evaluation of what is known about the development of wards, stakes

and branches. This thesis sheds light on questions such as: When did Mormon congregations split from just one per community? Where did the congregations meet? What were the first church-built local meeting places? Who were the leaders of the congregations and how did the role of a bishop evolve? When did the term “ward” come into use and take on its current meaning? When did local congregations meet? How did the meeting schedule for congregations develop? Who spoke at church meetings? How were Latter-day Saint congregational patterns and meeting practices influenced by other Christian denominations? How did revelation and prophetic guidance mold worship patterns and meeting practices into something distinct for that day’s Christianity? For a more complete answer to these and other similar questions, future study into the progress of wards from the Winter Quarters period up to present will be important.

Of course I have relied heavily on quality secondary sources, particularly the seminal works for each of the main periods studied. For the New York period, the Larry Porter dissertation⁵; Milton Backman’s *The Heavens Resound*⁶ for Ohio period; the Jennings,⁷ Parkin⁸, and Gentry⁹ dissertations for the Missouri period; and Glen

⁵ Larry C. Porter, “A Study of the Origins of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816-1831” (PhD diss. Brigham Young University, 1971).

⁶ Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983).

⁷ Warren Jennings, “Zion is Fled: The Expulsion of the Mormons from Jackson County, Missouri” (PhD diss., University of Florida, 1962).

Leonard's *Nauvoo: a Place of Peace, a People of Promise*¹⁰ for the Illinois period. Other works such as the seven-volume *History of the Church*¹¹ along with the Journal History of the Church¹² also have proven invaluable for this study.

I have also examined many primary sources, particularly journals and diaries. Bitton's *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies*¹³, and the Book of Abraham Project website¹⁴ with its digitized journals have helped identify relevant primary sources. Other articles and books specifically dealing with congregations, leadership and meeting places, including William Hartley's *My Fellow Servants*,¹⁵ have been useful in piecing together the congregational and worship patterns of the early Church.

The following chapters will consider the Church in New York and Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. They will demonstrate that the meeting structure and content of the young church, its congregations, local leadership, and buildings in which to

⁸ Max Parkin, "A History of the Latter-day Saints in Clay County, Missouri, from 1833 to 1837" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1976).

⁹ Leland H. Gentry, "A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri from 1836 to 1839" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1965).

¹⁰ Glen Leonard, *Nauvoo: a Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002).

¹¹ *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957).

¹² Journal History of the Church, Church History Library.

¹³ Davis Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1977).

¹⁴ Book of Abraham Project, accessed January 11, 2012, <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/>.

¹⁵ William G. Hartley, *My Fellow Servants: Essays on the History of the Priesthood* (Provo, BYU Studies: 2010).

worship were all gradually changed and refined to meet the needs of the growing, malleable church. The adjustments to the differing needs of the church from Fayette, New York to Nauvoo, Illinois show the adaptability of the movement whose claim was to be “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth,” (D&C 1:30) one led by a living prophet.

Chapter 2

Beginnings: New York and Ohio 1829-1838

There was no High Council speaker to kick off the three-hour block, nor clipboard passed around in Relief Society for a stake cannery assignment on the day of the organization of the Church of Christ on Tuesday, April 6, 1830. While quite different from the meetings of the current services of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, this and other early meetings laid a groundwork for the budding church. The organization of congregations, their meetings, leadership and worship locations all made strides from the first gatherings before the Church was officially formed to large, regular gatherings in Kirtland a few years later.

Perhaps the earliest meetings of the Mormon movement were the Smith family gatherings, in which Joseph told them of his visions and other religious experiences.¹ More formal meetings took place at the home of Peter Whitmer, Sr., in Fayette, Seneca County, New York. These were missionary meetings where Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery taught and baptized those who would believe. "Many opened their houses to us, in order that we might have an opportunity of meeting with our friends for the purpose of instruction and explanation."² Action followed learning in many of these

¹ Such as daily devotional meetings with the Whitmers, this included "scripture reading, singing and prayer." See *History of the Church*, 1:55.

² *History of the Church*, 1:51.

meetings. Joseph recorded in his manuscript history that, “many became believers and were baptized.”³ In an early meeting at the Whitmer home in June 1829, Joseph and Oliver were given instructions relative to the official organization of the Church, including section 18 of the Doctrine and Covenants.⁴ Later in the summer parts of section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants were revealed.⁵

First Meetings of the Newly Organized Church

The first official meeting of the Church of Christ⁶ was its legal organization on April 6, 1830, at the Peter Whitmer, Sr., home. Joseph Smith, Jr., presided and conducted. Elements of the first meeting included: prayer; business (including the legal organization of the Church and the accepting of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery as the first elders of the Church); ordinances such as the sacrament, confirming members of the Church, and ordaining men to priesthood offices; and instruction through revelation.⁷ Though there were six official members of the Church that day⁸, dozens

³ History, 1838–1856, volume A-1, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 6, 2012, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-colume-a-1#29>.

⁴ *History of the Church*, 1:60-70.

⁵ Scott H. Faulring, “An Examination of the 1829 ‘Articles of the Church of Christ’ in Relation to Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants,” *BYU Studies* 43, no. 4 (2004): 64.

⁶ Originally named “The Church of Christ,” in 1834 in order to avoid confusion with other denominations calling themselves the Church of Christ or the Church of Jesus Christ, the name was changed to “The Church of the Latter-day Saints.” In 1838 the name was revealed to be “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” (D&C 115:4)

⁷ Revelation now known as Doctrine and Covenants section 21.

⁸ Keith David Stott argues that the six members were not to fulfill a legal requirement at all, since it appears the church was being organized as a religious society, not a religious corporation (whose legal requirement was between 3 and 9). As a religious society,

more who would soon become members were also in attendance. With such a small group in the beginning, it is no wonder that the leadership essentially consisted of two Elders who were to be teachers as well. Other offices and quorums would be revealed and filled as the needs of the expanding Church dictated.

Oliver Cowdery gave the first public discourse at the Whitmer home on the following Sunday, April 11, and was followed by the baptism of other believers.⁹ Joseph Smith set out in that same month to Colesville, New York – nearly 100 miles away. There he taught the Joseph Knight family and others in a series of well-attended neighborhood meetings, eventually resulting in the baptism of a large number of converts who would make up a stalwart branch of the new Church.¹⁰ While specific accounts of these meetings are scarce, a similar meeting held six months later was described by Newel Knight. “On the 14th of October, Brother Hyrum Smith and I held a meeting at my uncle Hezekiah Peck’s. Brother Hyrum had great liberty of speech, and the Spirit of the Lord was poured out upon us in a miraculous manner. There was much good instruction and exhortation given, such as was calculated to encourage and strengthen the Saints in this their infantile state. At this meeting, four persons came

there was no legal numerical requirement, so the six members were probably not chosen for legal reasons. See Keith David Scott, “Legal Insights into the Organization of the Church in 1830,” *BYU Studies* 49, no. 2 (2010): 133-134.

⁹ *History of the Church*, 1:81.

¹⁰ *History of the Church*, 1:81-84. Many of the baptisms occurred in June 1830 (see *History of the Church* 1:86).

forward and manifested their desire to forsake all, serve their God in humility, and obey the requirements of the gospel.”¹¹

Another first was the Church's conference which took place on June 9, 1830, at Fayette, and was attended by about thirty members and many others “who were either believers or anxious to learn.”¹² Similar to the first official meeting, the conference included confirmations, sacrament, ordinations, and instruction. This conference, though held on a Wednesday, foreshadowed future Sunday meetings. The basic elements of the Sunday meetings then and now were singing, prayer, sermon, and sacrament.¹³ In the early years of Mormonism the sacrament was a part of various meetings – not necessarily taken just on Sundays or in a designated “sacrament meeting.” This illustrates that the new Church understood the need for the ordinance, but had not yet developed a firm meeting structure. It should be noted that not everything at this conference was parallel to modern sacrament meeting; one difference was that at the conclusion of the meeting, apparently each or all of the brethren present offered a prayer.¹⁴ The Journal History of the Church states that “Prayer was then

¹¹ Newel Knight, *Journal History of the Church*, October 1830.

¹² *History of the Church*, 1:84.

¹³ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 344.

¹⁴ It may not have been that each was a formal prayer in the sense thought of today as the benediction mentioned later certainly was. The 1828 Webster's Dictionary has the following definitions for prayer: “1. In worship, a solemn address to the Supreme Being, consisting of adoration, or an expression of our sense of God's glorious perfections, confession of our sins, supplication for mercy and forgiveness, intercession for blessings on others, and thanksgiving, or an expression of gratitude to God for his mercies and

offered by all the brethren present and the benediction was offered by Oliver Cowdery."¹⁵

One type of meeting at which the sacrament was administered at this time were special confirmation meetings held where members were confirmed and given the gift of the Holy Ghost. While living in Harmony, Pennsylvania, Joseph was visited by Newel Knight, "and as neither his wife nor mine had been as yet confirmed, it was proposed that we should confirm them, and partake together of the Sacrament, before he and his wife should leave us."¹⁶ Knight recorded of the event, "That evening the Saints assembled together and were confirmed, and partook of the sacrament. We had a happy meeting, having much reason to rejoice in the God of our salvation, and sing hosannas to His Holy name."¹⁷

While a clear pattern of when the sacrament was administered was not yet in place, these early confirmation meetings warranted the ordinance. These confirmation meetings continued to be important in Ohio, as will be shown later in this chapter.

benefits. A prayer however may consist of a single petition, and it may be extemporaneous, written or printed.

2. A formula of church service, or of worship, public or private.

3. Practice of supplication." Daniel Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828, s.v. "prayer."

¹⁵ Journal History of the Church, June 9, 1830.

¹⁶ *History of the Church*, 1:106. It was on his way to obtain the wine for this sacrament service that Joseph Smith recorded that he was visited by a "heavenly messenger" and received the revelation now known as Section 27 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

¹⁷ Journal History of the Church, August 29, 1830.

The early meetings of the new Church not only strengthened the faith of the members, but also were missionary opportunities in exposing more people to the restoration. Ezra Thayne was an early convert who was probably baptized in September or October of 1830.¹⁸ He described the first meeting he attended and how he was affected by it:

The next Sunday I went and there was a large concourse of people around his father's house [the Smith's residence near Palmyra], so that they extended to the road, filling up the large lot. I rushed in and got close to the stand, so as to be particular to hear what was said.

When Hyrum began to speak, every word touched me in the inmost soul. I thought every word was pointed to me. God punished me and riveted me to the spot. I could not help myself. The tears rolled down my cheeks, I was very proud and stubborn. There were many who knew me. I dare not look up. I sat until I recovered myself before I dare look up. They sung some hymns and that filled me with the Spirit. When Hyrum got through he picked up a book and said, "here is the Book of Mormon." I said, let me see it. I then opened the book, and I received a shock with such exquisite joy that no pen can write and no tongue can express. I shut the book and said, what is the price of it?" "Fourteen shilling" was the reply. I said, I'll take the book. I opened it again, and I felt a double portion of the Spirit, that I did not know whether I was in the world or not. I felt as though I was truly in heaven.¹⁹

The second conference of the Church on September 26, 1830, held at Fayette, contained business and worship. Joseph Smith's history indicates, "We now partook of the Sacrament, confirmed and ordained many, and attended to a great variety of Church business... we had much of the power of God manifested amongst us; the Holy

¹⁸ Porter, "Origins," 35.

¹⁹ Ezra Thayne, as cited in Porter, "Origins," 34-35.

Ghost came upon us, and filled us with joy unspeakable; and peace, and faith, and hope, and charity abounded in our midst.”²⁰ Also, an important revelation was received, now known as Doctrine and Covenants Section 28, which laid the groundwork for understanding stewardship.²¹ This proved to be an important concept—namely, revelation and authorized leadership comes only to the proper “steward”, or one whose calling authorizes him or her to act for a group. Without this clarifying concept of stewardship, congregational leadership would have been muddled, especially in the future as the numbers of branches and wards multiplied.

Shortly after the September conference, Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, Ziba Peterson and Peter Whitmer, Jun. were called to a mission among the “Lamanites,” or

²⁰ *History of the Church*, 1:115.

²¹ Joseph Smith’s leadership and how it related to Oliver Cowdery’s or other potential leaders was not completely clear at first. Though it was made clear in the revelation received on the day of the organization of the Church that Joseph’s “word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith” (D&C 21:5), there was no revelation or widespread understanding that his was an exclusive right to receive revelation for the Church. (see D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 8.) Hiram Page, one of the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon and a son-in-law to Peter Whitmer, Sr. had a “certain stone” (*History of the Church*, 1:109) by which he claimed to be receiving revelations for the Church. Some of the “revelations” were “entirely at variance with the order of God’s house” (*History of the Church*, 1:110). Many believed what Hiram Page claimed to be receiving. Though Oliver Cowdery, the “second elder” of the Church, was in the vicinity and should have moved to avert the confusion of the Hiram Page incident, he too was inexperienced as a believer and leader and largely accepted Page’s “revelations.” (*History of the Church*, 1:110) Joseph’s revelation recorded as Section 28 in the Doctrine and Covenants addresses this issue, making it clear that even as the second Elder, Oliver was to defer to Joseph in matters of revelation for the Church. “No one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jr., for he receiveth them even as Moses.” (D&C 28:2).

Native Americans.²² This mission had profound impact on the Church through the converts made by the missionaries en route to the “borders of the Lamanites.” Sidney Rigdon and the other numerous converts in the vicinity of Kirtland, Ohio, provided a foothold in the first gathering place for the Church.

One of the challenges of the first year of the Church’s organization was maintaining communication and leadership to all of the Saints. With the few members of the Church being so spread out – from Pennsylvania to Palmyra and Colesville to Kirtland and even Independence, Missouri – creating and maintaining unity in doctrine and organization was difficult.²³ An example of the difficulty caused by distance is the incident leading up to the receiving Doctrine and Covenants 28 (see footnote 21). The problem happened when Joseph was visiting the distant Colesville Branch, some one hundred miles away. Addressing this type of challenge was especially important at the infant stage of the movement, where zeal outpaced training and experience.

In December 1830, Joseph Smith received a revelation that would change the course of the Church: “a commandment I give unto the church, that it is expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio” (D&C 37:3). This assembling together in Ohio was an important expression of the Church’s commitment to Joseph’s prophetic leadership and of the desire to create Zion. It also uprooted many smaller congregations and families and allowed for larger groups. The fact that the vast

²² See Doctrine and Covenants Section 32

²³ Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 43.

majority of the members in New York and Pennsylvania made the sacrifice to go to Ohio is an impressive avowal of their dedication. The very devoted willingness to gather not only made large early congregations possible, but helped in building a sense of community – a group that not only met, but wanted to meet together.

In summary, the first nine months of the Church of Christ were an important time of development. They met outdoors in conferences as called by Joseph Smith, and they met in homes in their various separated communities at other times. They looked to Joseph as the leader of the Church, although he was a leader who could only occasionally visit the branches in the areas in which he did not reside. In Joseph's absence a presiding figure was set in place, first with Hyrum Smith and later Newel Knight in the Colesville Branch.²⁴ In a short time, the persecutions in New York and Pennsylvania, the difficulty of managing the growing church, and the prospect of better things promised by the Lord led most of the Saints to Ohio. There the size of the Church and doctrinal developments resulted in the construction of the first church buildings, including the Saints' crowning structure of the decade: the Kirtland temple.

Early Meeting Places in Ohio

Before the Kirtland temple was constructed, however, many other outdoor spots and buildings were used as meeting places in Ohio. A summary of some of the more

²⁴ *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, s.v. "Colesville, New York."

important locations parallels the adaptability of the organizational and meeting patterns. The places used for meetings also helped dictate the type, frequency, size and nature of the meetings.

The first public Mormon meeting in the Kirtland area was held in late October 1830 in the Mentor chapel, the very chapel in which Sidney Rigdon preached.²⁵ At the conclusion of the missionary meeting, Rigdon stood and encouraged his congregation to “give the matter a careful investigation; and not turn against it, without being fully convinced of its being an imposition, lest they should, possibly, resist the truth.”²⁶

Parley Pratt and his companions baptized 135 people in Kirtland and the surrounding area.²⁷ His description of the meetings they held foreshadows the success the Church would have in this area: “The news of our coming was noised abroad, and the news of the discovery of the Book of Mormon and the marvelous events connected with it. The interest and excitement now became general in Kirtland, and in all the region round about. The people thronged us night and day, insomuch that we had no time for rest and retirement. Meetings were convened in different neighborhoods, and multitudes came together soliciting our attendance; while thousands flocked about us daily; some

²⁵ *History of the Church*, 1:124

²⁶ Karl R. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's Kirtland: Eyewitness Accounts* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book, 1989), 5.

²⁷ *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, s.v. “Kirtland, Ohio.”

to be taught, some for curiosity, some to obey the gospel, and some to dispute or resist it."²⁸

The Campbellite chapel in Mentor was apparently not welcoming to the Mormons after so many in the congregation were baptized by the missionaries. A later attempt to preach at the chapel by Parley Pratt highlights the necessity of the Church having its own buildings rather than relying on the use of others:

I then appointed a meeting in the open air, on the steps of a meeting house owned by a people called "Campbellites," one Mr. Alexander Campbell being their leader they having refused to open the house to me. Some came to hear, and some to disturb the meeting; and one Mr. Newel soon appeared at the head of a mob of some fifty men and a band of music. These formed in order of battle and marched round several times near where I stood, drowning my voice with the noise of their drums and other instruments. I suspended my discourse several times as they passed, and then resumed. At length, finding that no disturbance of this kind would prevent the attempt to discharge my duty, they rushed upon me with one accord at a given signal, every man throwing an egg at my person. My forehead, bosom, and most of my body was completely covered with broken eggs. At this I departed, and walked slowly away, being insulted and followed by this rabble for some distance. I soon arrived in Kirtland, and was assisted by my kind friends in cleansing myself and clothes from the effects of this Christian benevolence.²⁹

Though many different buildings would be significant meeting places for the Saints in Ohio, there would not be a building large enough to fit all of the Saints for

²⁸ Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 52.

²⁹ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 161.

worship while in that state. In 1855 Elder George A. Smith indicated that during Joseph Smith's time, "'Mormonism' flourished best out of doors."³⁰

Isaac Morley Farm. Shortly after the first experience with Sidney Rigdon's congregation, the missionaries stopped at the Isaac Morley farm in Kirtland.³¹ There they taught Isaac Morley, Lyman Wight and others of the "common stock family," a group of Campbellites attempting to live a communal society. The common stock family was quite amenable to the message of restoration taught by the Mormon missionaries, since their attempt at economic equality stemmed from a desire to restore New Testament Christianity. All the members of the common stock family (consisting of about fifty people) were presently baptized.³² The Isaac Morley farm served as one of the hubs of Mormonism in Kirtland. The first confirmation meeting was held there on November 4, 1830.³³

From November 1830 until September 1831, the Isaac Morley farm was the primary settling place for Saints gathering to Kirtland. Mary Elizabeth Rollins, a young convert from Kirtland, said that in 1831, Isaac Morley "owned a large farm, about a mile from Kirtland, and some three or four families went there to live, and meetings were

³⁰ George Albert Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: Latter-day Saint's Book Depot, 1855-86), 3:23, August 12, 1855.

³¹ Anderson, *Kirtland*, 5.

³² Anderson, *Kirtland*, 6.

³³ Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 6.

held there.”³⁴ Joseph Smith stayed at the Isaac Morley home while he waited for a small home to be built on the farm. His living on the property after his arrival to Kirtland made it even more of a center point for the Church in Kirtland. That homes were such vital meeting places at this stage of the Church shows that despite the lack of resources or meetinghouses, the Saints were determined to gather together and “instruct and edify each other” (D&C 43:8).

The conference of the Church in June 1831 highlighted important meeting places on the Morley farm. Levi Hancock reported that they “met in a little string of buildings under the hill near Isaac Morley's in Kirtland, Geauga County, Ohio. Then we all went to a school house on the hill about one fourth of a mile ascending nearly all the way. The building was built of logs. It was filled with slab benches, Here the elders were seated and the meeting was opened as usual.”³⁵ The Morley farm was not the center place of Kirtland for long—also at the conference Isaac Morley was called to go to Missouri. Shortly after his arrival there he was instructed to send for his family and have his farm sold.³⁶

It is not clear how often the Church met at this early period in Kirtland, but certainly it at least held meetings on Sundays. James Rollins, Mary Elizabeth's brother,

³⁴ Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, *Autobiography*, quoted in *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, July 1926, 194.

³⁵ Levi Hancock, “The Levi Hancock Journal,” Americana Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

³⁶ Susan Easton Black, *Who's Who in the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 199. Titus Billings was directed to sell the farm in August 1831.

indicates that these Sabbath meetings were held at the Morley farm.³⁷ Speaking of the time between the introduction of the Church in Kirtland and Joseph Smith's arrival in February 1831, Philo Dibble, another early Kirtland convert, indicated that "meetings were held occasionally by the members of the Church in Kirtland, all of which I attended."³⁸

Newel K. Whitney Home. The Newel K. Whitney home was also an important meeting place in the first year of the Church in Kirtland. Concerning one of the meetings Philo Dibble attended here, he wrote, "At a meeting held one evening at Brother [Newel K.] Whitney's, the heavens were opened and the Spirit of God filled the house and rested upon all the congregation to overflowing."³⁹ Though the early Saints would have gladly used spacious church buildings had they been available, clearly they were not kept from having meaningful religious experiences as they met together in homes.

Joseph Smith Jr. Home. As with his previous dwelling places, Joseph's home in Kirtland (a larger one north of the temple that he and his family moved into around February 1834) took on great importance to the Church. Though it appears that no "normal" worship meetings analogous to modern sacrament meetings took place at the

³⁷ James Rollins, "A Life Sketch (1816-1839) of James Henry Rollins," accessed December 1, 2010, <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/JRollins.html>.

³⁸ Philo Dibble, *Autobiography*, quoted in *Four Faith Promoting Classics* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 77.

³⁹ Dibble, *Autobiography*, 79.

Joseph Smith, Jr., home, important leadership and council meetings were held there. Perhaps the most significant was the February 17 meeting where the first High Council and Stake were organized (D&C 102). Interestingly, the Stake, which eventually became one of the most vital organizations to running and regulating congregational worship, was not even organized in a church building. This highlights the point that so frequently is made clear in Kirtland – homes were the chapels, offices, classrooms and council rooms for the fledgling movement.

Red Schoolhouse on the Flats. A little red schoolhouse on Kirtland Flats existed when the Mormons arrived in 1830. It was 40 yards east of the Whitney store “on the south side of Chardon road, the farthest east, almost at the foot of Chardon hill.”⁴⁰ This schoolhouse was used for public meetings for the Saints by 1835. Joseph Smith recorded, “Sunday, December 13, 1835 --At the usual hour, ten a.m., attended meeting at the school house on the flats. Elder Jesse Hickcock preached a very feeling discourse.”⁴¹ Speaking of the large number of Saints attending meetings before the temple dedication one man said, “There is so many elders in Kirtland that they can hardly get in the largest school house here, and that is as large as meeting houses in general. We hold our meetings in two places and nearly half of them have to go home because they cannot get in. I expect that the large house [temple] will hardly hold all

⁴⁰ Arthur D. Coe, “Little Red Schoolhouse,” *Willoughby Republican Newspaper*, June 29, 1921.

⁴¹ *History of the Church*, 2:330.

the saints here.”⁴² It appears that after the dedication services of the Kirtland temple, the Saints did not use the red schoolhouse anymore.

Schoolhouse/Printing Office. In the summer of 1833, the Church’s printing press in Missouri was destroyed. In early 1834, a schoolhouse that would double as the printing office for the Church was begun. By 1833 there were 150 members of the Church in Kirtland Township.⁴³ Having regular meetings with this many people was easily handled if they could meet out of doors, but too often weather did not cooperate. Lucy Mack Smith explained, “It seemed as if the prince of the power of the air was permitted greatly to prevail against us, for several successive Sabbaths before meeting was closed, we were overtaken by dreadful storms.”⁴⁴ She recognized that “we much needed a house of worship where we could hold meetings without being interrupted, as we must be in a dwelling where a family resided.”⁴⁵ The perceived need by the members in Kirtland for a building in which to meet is evidenced by their response to Lucy Smith’s taking up a subscription for its completion. “In about two weeks I had everything in fine order for commencing the work.”⁴⁶

⁴² Roger and Clarissa Orton to Calvin Bicknell, February 7, 1836, Vault Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collection, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

⁴³ Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 140.

⁴⁴ Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith By His Mother*, Edited by Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 315.

⁴⁵ Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 315.

⁴⁶ Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 316.

The completion of the schoolhouse marked an important precedent in building structures where meeting services could be held. This particular building acted not only as a location for worship services and a printing office, but also where the Lectures on Faith were first given⁴⁷, an office for the First Presidency, and the place where the Twelve Apostles⁴⁸ and First Quorum of the Seventy⁴⁹ were chosen and ordained. Multifaceted church buildings helped meet the needs of a church that was rich in faith but poor in resources, facilitating worship as well as business and other needs of Church groups.

Kirtland Temple. The Church in Kirtland quickly outgrew the red schoolhouse and the new schoolhouse. The population of the Church in Kirtland surpassed 1,000 in 1835. The solution to the insufficient space for worship in buildings for the growing population was the completion of one of the most significant buildings in all of Latter-day Saint history: the Kirtland Temple. One member recalled, “It is now March 1833 and we had not a place to worship in... The Lord ... gave a command to build a Temple.”⁵⁰

In a revelation dated December 1832, Joseph Smith recorded the commandment to, “establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a

⁴⁷The Lectures on Faith were given at the continuation of the School of the Prophets (or “school of the Elders”) *History of the Church*, 2:180.

⁴⁸ *History of the Church*, 2:181.

⁴⁹ *History of the Church*, 2:182.

⁵⁰ Hancock, Journal, 52.

house of learning, a house of glory, a house of God” (D&C 88:119). Though land was purchased for the temple shortly after this commandment, construction had not started on it by June 1, 1833. The following was given through Joseph Smith on that date: “Wherefore, ye must needs be chastened and stand rebuked before my face; for ye have sinned against me a very grievous sin, in that ye have not considered the great commandment in all things, that I have given unto you concerning the building of mine house” (D&C 95:3). Construction began shortly thereafter.⁵¹

Divine instructions for the edifice showed that this initial temple had congregational uses in mind: “And let the lower part of the inner court be dedicated unto me for your sacrament offering, and for your preaching, and your fasting, and your praying, and the offering up of your most holy desires unto me, saith your Lord. And let the higher part of the inner court be dedicated unto me for the school of mine apostles” (D&C 95:16-17).

The building of this temple would simultaneously show the capability of the growing Church and stretch its financial and labor resources to their limits. There were no Church members who had the qualification or experience in architecture to undertake such a major building project. It was generally understood that they were

⁵¹ Four days later, Hyrum Smith and Reynolds Cahoon began digging the trench for the walls of the temple. (see *History of the Church*, 1:353)

building the temple after a pattern revealed to Joseph Smith.⁵² No doubt the completion of this impressive edifice strengthened the conviction that God would provide for his Saints. As the Church expanded and members received more experience – and greater resources were available – design of buildings could be done by more trained architects.

The design and completion of the Kirtland temple are compelling evidences that the young Church was adaptable enough not only to meet obvious needs, but to fulfill commandments that seemed, and perhaps were, above their abilities. Less than three years after construction began, the Saints finished the temple at enormous sacrifice of time, material, and labor--and at a price tag of between \$40,000 and \$60,000.⁵³ This would be close to \$860,000 - \$1.25 million in today's currency.⁵⁴

Impressively, this colossal task was accomplished by a mere fraction of the membership of the Church – there were more members of the Church in Missouri than in Kirtland. In the summer of 1831, Joseph Smith identified western Missouri as the site for the future city of Zion.⁵⁵ In response to the desire to establish Zion and at the direction of Church leadership, most converts answered the call to gather and went to Missouri, though a good number continued to settle in and around Kirtland. In 1833 when the temple building began in earnest, there were only 150 Saints in Kirtland

⁵² Milton V. Backman, "Establish a House of Prayer, a House of God: The Kirtland Temple" in *Prophet Joseph: Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith*, ed. Larry C. Porter, Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 209.

⁵³ Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 161.

⁵⁴ The Inflation Calculator, accessed June 24, 2013, <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/>.

⁵⁵ See Doctrine and Covenants Section 57

Township⁵⁶, compared with 1,200 in Missouri⁵⁷. By the time the temple was complete in 1836, there were 1,300⁵⁸ Saints in Kirtland and over 4,000⁵⁹ in Missouri.

Though the bulk of the membership was in Missouri, the administrative headquarters were still in Ohio. While certainly filling the need for a larger place to meet, the Kirtland temple would be more than just the first major meetinghouse built by the Church. Its importance was more in fulfilling a promise given in a revelation dated January 2, 1831, “go to the Ohio... and there you shall be endowed with power from on high” (D&C 38:32). The time surrounding the completion and dedication of the temple is referred to as a “Pentecostal season” where open visions and other spiritual phenomena were reported.⁶⁰ It was in this temple that Joseph Smith had priesthood keys restored⁶¹ and the beginnings of the temple ordinances were begun.⁶²

That the temple was being used and viewed as a place for general worship services distinguishes it from modern-day LDS temples. The plans for the temple in Zion as well as the Nauvoo temple carry over some of this thought, much of the space is designed for large congregational meetings rather than structured for temple-specific

⁵⁶ Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 140. There were certainly more members living in the vicinity of Kirtland, exactly how many is hard to tell. By 1835, there were over 200 in the surrounding area. (see Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 139).

⁵⁷ *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, s.v. “Missouri.”

⁵⁸ Backman, *Heavens*, 140.

⁵⁹ J. Christopher Conkling, *Joseph Smith Chronology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 94.

⁶⁰ See chapter 16 of Backman’s, *Heavens Resound*.

⁶¹ See Doctrine and Covenants Section 110

⁶² Backman, “Establish a House of Prayer”, 216-217.

ordinance ceremonies as in modern temples. As the doctrines surrounding the temple and its ordinances developed through the years, temples would all but lose their roles as Sunday sacrament meeting places for congregations. The dual uses of the early temples—Kirtland and Nauvoo—demonstrate that practical needs were addressed by the Church as it fulfilled divine expectation. The Kirtland temple was the primary meeting place in Ohio until persecution and internal strife would lead the Saints to leave Kirtland and abandon its temple in 1838.

From missionary meetings in buildings owned by other denominations to outdoor gatherings on the property of early Ohio converts to the packed dedication of the Kirtland temple, the command to “assemble themselves together at the Ohio” provided the first opportunity for Mormon-built meetinghouses. The drastic growth in building construction reflects the similarly striking expansion in membership.

Meeting Patterns in Ohio

Just as there were no specifically designated meeting houses in the earliest days of the Church, so there was no set pattern of the worship meeting for the Church in the first part of the 1830s. A revelation to Joseph Smith given on March 8, 1831, gave direction, as to how meetings were to be conducted: “It always has been given to the elders of my church from the beginning, and ever shall be, to conduct all meetings as they are directed and guided by the Holy Spirit” (D&C 46:2). This direction to be flexible and guided demonstrates the uniqueness of this revelation centric movement.

As noted previously, the sacrament was taken at various meetings on the Sabbath and throughout the week. In August 1831, Joseph Smith recorded a revelation that gave a general guide as to the Lord's expectation of the Church regarding Sabbath worship: "And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day; For verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High; Nevertheless thy vows shall be offered up in righteousness on all days and at all times; But remember that on this, the Lord's day, thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High, confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord." (D&C 59:9-12) One element of sacrament meetings that differed then from now is that as the common cup was passed around with the wine or water and the plate or basket was passed with the bread, there would be a speaker teaching, as opposed to the silence now found (crying children excepted) during the sacrament.⁶³

Many of the Saints had New England roots, and Sabbath observance was a part of their lives long before their association with Joseph Smith.⁶⁴ The expectation was that the Church would meet on Sundays, but they certainly were not limited to Sabbath meetings as "thy vows shall be offered up in righteousness on all days and at all times" (D&C 59:11). Some of the practices adopted by the Church followed New England

⁶³ Harley, *Fellow Servants*, 345.

⁶⁴ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 333-334.

Puritan patterns, such as singing, preaching and prayer. However, others were a clear rejection of the past in establishing distinct traditions for a restored Church. For example: Mormon prayers and sermons were not given by a college trained clergyman, but by a member of the congregation. A revelation that influenced sermon delivery was: “Neither take ye thought beforehand what ye shall say; but treasure up in your minds continually the words of life, and it shall be given you in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man” (D&C 84:85). This type of congregational involvement and freely directed speech is a departure from the Calvinist traditions many were familiar with.

Though certainly influenced by their upbringings and surrounding, Joseph Smith and the early Saints did not just think of their new religion as a hodgepodge of other traditions, and indeed it was not. The Church was a unique restored movement. An indication of this perception and that the manner of conducting meetings in the Church was a cause for concern by October 1831; Joseph Smith informed the Elders at a conference in Hiram, Ohio that the following day they would “hold a meeting so that the members might understand the ancient manner of conducting meetings.”⁶⁵ It was recorded in the *History of the Church* that “the Elders were instructed in the ancient manner of conducting meetings, of which knowledge most of them were ignorant. A

⁶⁵Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, *Far West Record* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1983), 17.

committee of six was appointed to instruct the several branches of the Church.”⁶⁶ It appears, then, that one of the committee’s purposes was to instruct branches on what they had learned about conducting meetings.

That music was an essential part of the early Mormon worship experience is evidenced by the revelation to Emma Smith to “make a selection of sacred hymns, as it shall be given thee, which is pleasing unto me, to be had in my church. For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads” (D&C 25:22-12). This instruction was given in July 1830, and the finished hymnal came off the presses in late 1835 or early 1836. At a time when so much effort and so many resources could be put in other places, the fact that a hymnal was a priority shows what a cardinal place music had in Mormon meetings.

One type of meeting that had continued importance in Ohio was the confirmation meeting. While some, like John Murdock, were under the impression that confirmation meetings were only for baptized members,⁶⁷ others, like John Corrill, attended them as part of their investigation of the Church.⁶⁸ The primary purpose of the confirmation meeting was, of course, the ordinance of confirmation and bestowal of

⁶⁶ *History of the Church*, 1:219

⁶⁷ John Murdock, *Diaries and Autobiography*, Manuscript Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 8.

⁶⁸ John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Saint Louis: 1839) 9.

the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands. Prayers, preaching, administration of the sacrament, testimonies, and occasionally exercising gifts of the spirit, such as speaking in tongues, were often part of the confirmation meeting.⁶⁹ John Corrill gives an interesting account of an early confirmation meeting:

I went to Kirtland to see for myself, and whilst there, watched every movement with a jealous eye. I attended several meetings, one of which was the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, which, I thought, would give me a good opportunity to detect their hypocrisy. The meeting lasted all night, and such a meeting I never attended before. They administered the sacrament, and laid on hands, after which I heard them prophecy [sic] and speak in tongues unknown to me. Persons in the room, who took no part with them, declared, from the knowledge they had of the Indian languages, that the tongues spoken were regular Indian dialects, which I was also informed, on inquiry, the persons who spoke had never learned. I watched closely and examined carefully, every movement of the meeting, and after exhausting all my powers to find the deception, I was obliged to acknowledge, in my own mind, that the meeting had been inspired by some supernatural agency. The next day I returned home, satisfied that the evil reports were not true, and spent about six weeks more in the further investigation of the subject.⁷⁰

A few years after their arrival in Kirtland, the Saints had established a general pattern for worship services. The basic model of two Sunday meetings would have been familiar to and may have been borrowed by the Saints – it was not uncommon for churches of this time to proscribe the morning and afternoon Sabbath meetings.⁷¹ It appears that although the dual-meeting Sunday service was well-established in

⁶⁹ Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Impact of the First Preaching in Ohio" *BYU Studies* Vol. 11:1 (Summer 1971), 492.

⁷⁰ Corrill, *A Brief History*, 9.

⁷¹ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 344.

Kirtland, the practice was common in other areas of the Church as well. In Bath, New Hampshire, Orson Pratt wrote on September 8, 1833, "Being the Sabbath we held a meeting in the forenoon and also one in the afternoon".⁷² Six months later, while in Kirtland, Pratt recorded, "March 16th. Being the Sabbath, I attended two meetings. Brothers Sidney and Parley preached."⁷³

The Kirtland meeting schedule is summed up well by Milton Backman in his landmark work on Kirtland, *Heavens Resound*:

By the mid-1830s a basic pattern had been established in Kirtland for Sunday worship. Members gathered at 10:00 A.M. for their morning meeting. The service opened with congregational singing and a vocal prayer. This was usually followed by one or two sermons. Then the congregation sang another hymn, and one of the members offered benediction. A second service was usually held in the afternoon. In addition to following the pattern of the morning meeting, the afternoon service generally included the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. On occasion, this ordinance was also administered between the Sabbath services, on Sunday evenings, and during the week in the homes of the Saints. Initially the emblems of the sacrament were bread and wine. The first reference in Joseph Smith's history to members receiving bread and water was recorded under the date April 6, 1837.

Sunday services sometimes included confirmations of new members or marriage ceremonies. On January 17, 1836, Joseph Smith married three couples during the afternoon service; since the congregation was unusually large that day, creating an unpleasant crowded condition, following the marriage and the administration of the sacrament the Prophet dismissed the congregation. Individuals who had recently been baptized were often confirmed at Sunday meetings. William Burgess recalled that during the week in which he was baptized, about thirty other individuals received this ordinance. The

⁷²Orson Pratt, *The Orson Pratt Journals*, comp. Elden Jay Watson (Salt Lake City: Eldon Jay Watson, 1975), 25.

⁷³ Orson Pratt, *Journal*, 35.

following Sunday, the converts occupied the first three rows, and one by one they were confirmed members of the Church.⁷⁴

Clearly, the basic elements of the meetings that were found in 1830 – namely prayers, singing, sacrament and sermons – were still the makeup of these mid-1830s gatherings. The sacrament was not administered in every meeting, and there was more done in the meetings than just the four parts mentioned, but they formed the core. It is apparent that ordaining was a significant part of what happened on the Sunday meetings, as “We had a meeting every Saturday to bless and ordain such as had been called.”⁷⁵ Enacting Church business continued to be integral in Sunday meetings—the ever-expanding Church always had ordinances to perform and callings to extend.

The burden of preaching sermons in Mormon meetings was a shared one. With the lack of paid clergy, lay members taught and preached. Historian Richard Bushman summarized, “The line between laity and clergy, the most significant social division in Christian ecclesiastical society, was erased. Joseph, a plain man himself, inexperienced in preaching, trusted ordinary men to carry the message.”⁷⁶ The men delivering sermons tried to rely on the spirit to provide him with exactly what to say. Historian Davis Bitton noted that, “just as it was unheard of for a person to read a testimony or a

⁷⁴ Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 264.

⁷⁵ Harrison Burgess, “A Short Sketch of the Life of Harrison Burgess,” quoted in Kenneth Glyn Hales, *Windows: A Mormon Family* (Tucson: Skyline Printing, 1985), 103.

⁷⁶ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 153.

prayer, it was virtually unthinkable in the nineteenth century to give a memorized or prewritten sermon."⁷⁷ A word often used in reference to speaking freely by the Spirit was "liberty."⁷⁸ William McLellin described one Parley Pratt's sermons in these terms, "Br Parley on Friday night attended another meeting among the brethren [w]here he had great Liberty and unfolded to [them] the dealings of the Lord from the creation down until John said 'It is done.'"⁷⁹ As such, sermons varied in eloquence from speaker to speaker.

Women's public speaking was limited in the early days of the Church. Historian Davis Bitton pointed out, "At the beginning, and for many years, only males served formally as missionaries and did all of the preaching in Church conferences and even in sacrament meetings. On the other hand, women bore testimonies, sometimes functioned unofficially as missionaries, met among themselves in meetings of instruction and spiritual outpouring. . . . There is no convenient way to know how many women preached in sacrament meetings as time progressed, but many did so. Many others 'preached' in the Sunday School, Primary, and Young Women organizations begun in the latter half of the century."⁸⁰ Mary Fielding wrote to her sister about a Thursday fast and testimony meeting in Kirtland, "Our Thursday meeting

⁷⁷ Davis Bitton, "'Strange Ramblings': The Ideal and Practice of Sermons in Early Mormonism," *BYU Studies*, 41:1 (2002), 8.

⁷⁸ Bitton, "Strange Ramblings," 9.

⁷⁹ Jan Shipps and John Welch, eds., *The Journals of William E. McLellin 1831-1836* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 96.

⁸⁰ Bitton, "Strange Ramblings," 25.

was again better than any former one. The hearts of the people were melted and the spirit and power of God rested down upon us in a remarkable manner. Many spoke in tongues and others prophesied and interpreted. It has been said by many who have lived in Kirtland a great while that such a time of love and refreshing has never been known. Some of the sisters ... engaged in conversing in tongues, their countenances beaming with joy."⁸¹ It is clear from Mary's letter that women felt as if they were a part of the meetings, especially in the manifestations of gifts of the spirit. Though women did not often speak in meetings in Kirtland, they were expected to attend the meetings.⁸² Joseph reprimanded Emma "for leaving the meeting before Sacrament; she made no reply, but manifested contrition by weeping."⁸³

An important meeting in the Church that evolved through the years was the conference. Joseph would have been familiar with the conferences of Methodism. Methodists would meet every three months in a "quarterly conference," where all of the "preachers of the circuit, its Local preachers, exhorters, leaders, stewards"⁸⁴ met to conduct business and have meetings with the families living within the circuit.

Delegates were chosen to represent the circuit at an Annual Conference of a larger

⁸¹ Kenneth W. and Audrey M. Godfrey, Jill Mulvay Derr, *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-Day-Saints 1830-1900* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 61.

⁸² Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, "Sweet Counsel and Seas of Tribulation: The Religious Life of the Women in Kirtland," *BYU Studies*, Vol. 20 No. 2 (1980): 8.

⁸³ *History of the Church*, 2:304

⁸⁴ Abel Stephens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1867), 3:223.

geographic area, and every four years a General Conference, where important official business was undertaken, was held with delegates from the Annual Conferences.

In following the revealed mandate to “meet in conference once in three months” (D&C 20:61), Joseph Smith adopted the basic idea of convening conferences (sometimes also called councils in the early part of the Church) for discussing, deciding and conducting important business. An average of eight Elders attended, including a moderator and a clerk.⁸⁵ Unlike the Methodist system, Joseph would call conferences whenever he felt the need; thus, the requirement for quarterly conferences given in the Articles and Covenants was generally exceeded.

Latter-day Saints in the present day reading about the various conferences in the 1830s could be confused since there were more than just General Conferences, and this part of history is before ward or stake conferences, as are commonly known today.⁸⁶ It wasn't until 1838 that the semiannual General Conference was firmly established.⁸⁷ The more frequent conferences allowed for discussion and even revelations on pressing matters and the training of the Church's generally young leadership.

As previously mentioned, Sunday was not the only time the Saints in Kirtland met. One member recalled, “The winter of 1836 I attended a ... [School of the Elders] together with Brothers Joseph, and Hyrum and most of the heads of the church. It was a

⁸⁵ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 251-252.

⁸⁶ Also, the word “conference” was used to denote a geographical location for areas in the “mission field” outside major Church centers.

⁸⁷ *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, s.v. “General Conference.”

fine opportunity for [getting] instruction. The evenings were mostly spent in meetings for instruction in the principles of our faith and religion."⁸⁸ Another said of this time, "The brethren had meetings of some kind almost every evening in the week."⁸⁹ The monthly fast meeting was held in the temple on the first Thursday of every month and was presided over by Joseph Smith, Sr. These meetings included bearing of testimony, singing, praying and occasionally the exhibition of gifts of the spirit, such as speaking in tongues. This was one meeting where women were apparently active participants.

Prescindia Huntington recalled these meetings in Kirtland,

At another fast meeting I was in the temple with my sister Zina. The whole of the congregation were on their knees, praying vocally, for such was the custom at the close of these meetings when Father Smith presided; yet there was no confusion; the voices of the congregation mingled softly together. While the congregation was thus praying, we both heard, from one corner of the room above our heads, a choir of angels singing most beautifully. They were invisible to us, but myriads of angelic voices seemed to be united in singing some song of Zion, and their sweet harmony filled the temple of God. . . .

At another time a cousin of ours came to visit us at Kirtland. She wanted to go to one of the saints' fast meetings, to hear someone sing or speak in tongues, but she said she expected to have a hearty laugh. Accordingly we went with our cousin to the meeting, during which a Brother McCarter rose and sang a song of Zion in tongues; I arose and sang simultaneously with him the same tune and words, beginning and ending each verse in perfect unison, without varying a word. It was just as though we had sung it together a thousand times. After we came out of meeting, our cousin observed, "Instead of laughing, I never felt so solemn in my life."⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Harrison Burgess, *autobiography*, 103.

⁸⁹ Caroline Crosby *Journal*, quoted in Godfrey and Derr, *Women's Voices*, 48.

⁹⁰ Prescindia Lathrop Huntington, *Autobiography*, accessed June 24, 2013, <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/PHuntington.html>.

Church meetings in Kirtland began to take on a recognizable pattern: one morning and one afternoon Sabbath service. Sermons were generally extemporaneous, some seeing the sermons as inspired and inspiring and others viewing them as rambling and confused. The Sacrament ordinance was administered often, if not so clearly documented that it could be said weekly. Other mid-week gatherings were also important, including the Thursday fast meeting and confirmation meetings. The regular pattern of Sunday services and other times of instruction, like conferences, were made possible by faithful believers gathering. Also, the meeting of the Kirtland period helped strengthen those who chose to relocate.

Leadership and Identity of Congregations in Ohio

There were no wards in the Church until 1839, and the first stakes were formed in 1834.⁹¹ Some of the earliest language used in talking about congregations is in the Articles and Covenants, referring to “the several churches, composing the church of Christ” (D&C 20:81). More commonly, and a little later, the congregations were known as “branches” (D&C 72:23). There was no set method for dividing up branches. The believers in each community met together and were a branch. The Church looked to Joseph Smith as the leader of the Church, though local presidents were assigned in the

⁹¹ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 355.

different branches. In fact, a congregation was not considered complete until a “designated leader was placed at the head.”⁹²

In 1830, shortly after Joseph Smith learned about the significant numbers of converts in the Kirtland area, he sent John Whitmer to Kirtland to preside over the branch there. Isaac Morley had been the presiding Elder up to that point.⁹³ Though John Whitmer was to preside over the branch, it was clear that Joseph Smith was the recognized leader of the Saints, even in Kirtland. Joseph sent multiple hand-written revelations to direct and strengthen the Church in Ohio.⁹⁴

The Church continued to grow, and there were twenty-four branches in Ohio alone by 1838.⁹⁵ Even large communities of Saints in one place, such as Kirtland, were still considered one branch. It appears that branch presidents were usually chosen among the converts in each community, although some were assigned to go preside over a branch where they did not reside at the time, as is the case with John Whitmer cited above.

While bishops in modern times are assigned to preside over local congregations and assist in temporal and spiritual matters, the first bishops, called in 1831, had no specific congregations they were to lead. Edward Partridge was the first bishop, called

⁹² Matthew A. Crawford, “Branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 1830-1834” (masters thesis, Brigham Young University, 2007), 101.

⁹³ Mary Lightner Autobiography, 194.

⁹⁴ Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 41-42.

⁹⁵ Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 48.

in February 1831 (see D&C 41). His responsibilities mainly consisted of facilitating the “law of consecration” (see D&C 42). Newel K. Whitney was called as the second bishop in December 1831 (see D&C 72). These two bishops served more as regional leaders: Partridge for Missouri and Whitney for Ohio and the eastern States. With the further understanding that bishops were the presidents of the Aaronic priesthood, bishops Partridge and Whitney assisted in organizing Aaronic priesthood quorums and choosing their leadership.⁹⁶

Isolated branches and their leaders needed more help at this early period of the Church’s history. In 1831, Joseph directed that he and about a score of others were to be ordained to the office of high priest within the “high priesthood” (Melchizedek Priesthood).⁹⁷ In 1832 he chose two counselors, which led to the formation of the First Presidency.⁹⁸ High priest councils would govern the church until the formation of stakes in 1834.⁹⁹ In 1835 it was revealed that the Melchizedek priesthood had “authority over all the offices in the church in all ages of the world, to administer in spiritual things” (D&C 107:8). High priests and especially high councils played important roles in governing the branches of the Church in the 1830s.

The first high council was organized in Kirtland on February 17, 1834. It consisted of twelve high priests that were to be a standing council for the Church. At

⁹⁶ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 116.

⁹⁷ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 14.

⁹⁸ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 324.

⁹⁹ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 15.

first the Kirtland high council was a council for the whole church.¹⁰⁰ Then in July 1834, a high council in Clay County, Missouri was formed. At this time the world was viewed by the church as either being in the cities of Zion, or in the mission field.¹⁰¹ The council of the Twelve Apostles formed in 1835 was viewed as the council for all the branches in the mission field, while the three-man presidency and high council in each respective stake of Zion were the governing bodies for that stake. This role changed following the 1839-41 mission of the Twelve, after which they were given to preside over the church within and out of the stakes.¹⁰²

The general leadership assisted the leaders of the local congregations, and in the stakes like Kirtland, the general leadership *was* the leadership of the congregation. The hands-on role of the Prophet and other general leaders strengthened the young church, while the increasingly organized priesthood hierarchy ensured the future of Church government.

Conclusion

The remarkable success of Mormonism introduced unique challenges for the young church. The questions of “where to worship?”, “how?”, “with whom?” and “with what leaders?” provided notable opportunity for growth and a show of impressively inspired leadership. From a handful of believers meeting in homes in

¹⁰⁰ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 254.

¹⁰¹ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 255.

¹⁰² Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 325.

New York to thousands of zealous converts converging on the Kirtland Temple, much effort and many resources went toward providing places for church members to worship. As the Church grew, its meeting types and schedules adapted familiar meetings to meet the needs of the expanding body of Saints. With the formation of branches, which comprised all of the Saints in a particular town, the Church started to show glimmers of its modern-day organization – especially as multiple branches met together in conferences. Local leaders like presiding Elders or presidents of branches consequently took on more important roles, as did general leaders like high councils and the council of the Twelve Apostles. These various changes and responses to pressing needs helped prove that the Church of Christ, though fledgling, was indeed *living* – able to be guided and adapt in order to thrive.

Chapter 3

Gathering in the Gathering: Missouri 1831-1839

Building Zion, a city of God, was one of the driving ideals of the Latter-day Saints in the 1830s. In a September 1830 revelation, the Church was informed that “no man knoweth where the city of Zion shall be built, but it shall be given hereafter. Behold, I say unto you that it shall be on the borders by the Lamanites” (D&C 28:9). The eagerness for details about a chosen city where all the believers could gather in a utopian way of life made the revelation given on June 7, 1831 electrifying for the young organization: “And thus, even as I have said, if ye are faithful ye shall assemble yourselves together to rejoice upon the land of Missouri, which is the land of your inheritance, which is now the land of your enemies” (D&C 52:42). Over two dozen men were called to travel to Missouri where more would be revealed on the matter.

Joseph and his followers learned more about Zion and worked to establish it in Missouri over the next decade. Zion was to be the “model community.”¹ The meetings, congregations, and leadership of the Saints in Missouri reflected their enthusiasm for

¹ Jennings, “Zion is Fled,” 49.

and understanding of Zion. Developments made in Missouri, particularly in Jackson County, established precedent in how Mormon congregations would be organized. After its expulsion from Jackson County, the Church did not immediately implement some of the developments made in branch organization, as if in anticipation for a return to Jackson County. When it seemed clear a return was not imminent, the Saints put down congregational roots again, but only so far as their circumstances would allow in their new home in Northern Missouri.

Jackson County 1831-1833

Meetings in Jackson County. On the Sunday after the arrival of Joseph and his party in mid-July 1831, W.W. Phelps "preached to a western audience ... wherein were present specimens of all the families of the earth, for there were several of the Indians, quite a respectable number of negroes, and the balance was made up of citizens of the surrounding counties."² These early meetings must have had great significance to the Saints there since they knew that the "New Jerusalem" would be a place where believers from all nations would be gathered.

In early August a series of meetings were held, including two dedications and a conference. A few days after this first conference in Zion, Joseph received a revelation that gave divine direction on the Sabbath day for Latter-day Saints (D&C 59). The fact that this defining revelation on the Sabbath day was received in Zion seems to suggest a

² William W. Phelps, "H.J.S.," *Times and Seasons*, February 15, 1844.

correlation between Sabbath worship and Zion – Zion is a city of refuge, Sunday the day of refuge. Most Mormons had deep feelings and traditions surrounding the Sabbath even before they joined the Church, stemming in part from their earlier Protestant heritage.³ The lack of Sabbath observance and other perceived roughness-around-the-edges by the Missourians was jarring to these faithful saints.⁴ Joseph Smith wrote of the “degradation, leanness of intellect, ferocity and jealousy of a people that were nearly a century behind the times... without the benefit of civilization, refinement, or religion.”⁵ This was certainly one of the reasons for Joseph’s pondering that led to a revelation concerning the day of worship. The revelation instructed the Saints to “more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world...go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day; for verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High... But remember that on this, the Lord’s day, thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High, confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord” (D&C 59:2-12).

Following their new constitution for the Sabbath and their previous religious habits, the Saints in Jackson County held meetings each Sunday. Parley Pratt described these early church meetings in Missouri: “We enjoyed many happy seasons in our prayer and other meetings, and the Spirit of the Lord was poured out upon us, and

³ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 343-344.

⁴ *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, s.v. “Missouri Conflict.”

⁵ *History of the Church*, 1:189.

even on the little children, insomuch that many of eight, ten or twelve years of age spake, and prayed, and prophesied in our meetings and in our family worship. There was a spirit of peace and union, and love and good will manifested in this little Church in the wilderness, the memory of which will be ever dear to my heart.”⁶ The term “prayer meeting” was used at this time to describe various mid-week, and later even Sunday evening meetings. The fast meeting frequently held on Thursdays was also referred to as a “prayer meeting.”⁷ Methodists at this time held mid-week prayer meetings where they would engage in open discussions on religious topics.⁸

⁶ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 88.

⁷ Glen Leonard, “I Have a Question” *Ensign*, March 1998, 60.

⁸ Wandle Mace wrote of a visit to one of these meetings in September 1837. “Sometimes I visited the meetings held by the Methodists as prayer meetings. On one occasion of this kind they took for their subject a saying of Paul, ‘Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the Saints.’ Several persons present spoke upon the subject, very earnest and full of zeal. They clapped their hands, etc. and seemed to think they had exhausted the subject. They then invited me to speak.

“I spoke upon the same subject--viz, ‘contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the Saints.’ I endeavored to show how far short we came of having that faith. When that “faith” was delivered to the Saints, they were told to ‘Heal the sick, cast out devils, open the eyes of the blind, and to raise the dead,’ and ‘as freely as you have received, freely give.’ I asked, ‘Have we that faith?; Surely not. Can we heal the sick, cast out devils, open the eyes of the blind or raise the dead? Have we any of the gifts of the spirit? If we had, we could do all these things as did the apostles. These gifts are the result of the faith that was delivered to the Saints. I spoke at some length in this strain and sat down. As soon as I had taken my seat several were on their feet in a moment to confront me and denounce those Bible truths I had presented to them. They declared they were not needed in this age and it was ridiculous for any person to entertain such views. Confusion reigned and the meeting closed.” Wandle Mace, *Autobiography*, Vault Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections Harold B. Lee Library, 13.

Sunday meetings in the Missouri branches usually consisted of a meeting before noon and another after lunch, following the pattern many would have been familiar with at the time.⁹ Each branch met together for Sabbath services, with occasional bigger meetings and conferences all together. The way branches met in Jackson County was more in line with current Church practice than with the pattern later in Missouri, or even Kirtland or Nauvoo. This branch format conformed to their view of what that area was to become – the center place of the Kingdom of God where countless thousands of the righteous would assemble. Community meetings like the ones held in Kirtland or Nauvoo would not have been feasible when Zion had reached near its maximum population of 20,000.¹⁰

Branches in Jackson County. The most striking development made in the progress toward modern-day wards in the Missouri period was the splitting up of ecclesiastical branches by geography and population. Initially, the congregations were no different than in other areas of the church: the members from all nearby settlements met together. While the relative proximity (all of the settlements within about 10 miles of each other)¹¹

⁹ The morning and afternoon Sunday meetings continued in the Church until the late 1970s. Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 344.

¹⁰ City of Zion, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 24, 2013, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/place/city-of-zion>. See also Ivan J. Barrett, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration: A History of the Church to 1846* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1973), 237-238.

¹¹ This concentration of settlements with many Saints in relative proximity was different than in New York or in Ohio. For example, Palmyra and Fayette were about 25 miles

made it possible for them to all meet together, the distance was not convenient, making smaller, family meetings more popular. On July 13, 1832, at the Joseph Knight home in Kaw Township, the leaders in Zion met “for the purpose of dividing the Church on the land of Zion, into branches for the better convenience of holding meetings & organizing the Church &c.” At this time there were four branches: 1 - Colesville, 2 - Prairie, 3 - Whitmer, 4 - Blue Township (which included Independence).¹²

As more Saints made their way to Zion, these branches would be split and added upon as needed. Unlike other contemporary Mormon communities, these settlements in Zion would be split into smaller ecclesiastical branches, eventually numbering ten before the Saints were driven from the county.¹³ The central gathering place for the kingdom of God was to be prepared to accommodate huge numbers of people in their worship services through organized congregations. At its pinnacle, the city was to accommodate twenty thousand people, who would be split up into groups of approximately eight-hundred.¹⁴ Though the system was never fully implemented in Zion, the groundwork was laid and precedent set so that it could have been.

apart, and Colesville was another 75 miles away from Fayette. In Ohio, Hiram was about 25 miles away from Kirtland, while Amherst was about 50 miles from either one.

¹² LaMar C. Berrett and Max H Parkin, *Sacred Places: Missouri*, Vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 113-114.

¹³ Cannon, *Far West Record*, 65. It is possible that the ten branches were only decided on and never officially organized. For years after, members from this area referred to the earlier division of five branches. (see Parkin, “Clay County,” 30.)

¹⁴ Barrett, *Joseph Smith*, 237-238.

Church buildings and meeting places in Jackson County. Despite a little disappointment at the relatively small number of converts at the time of Joseph's arrival in Jackson County, he and his companions got to work.¹⁵ With a revelation confirming Jackson County as the location for Zion (D&C 57:2-7), they designated two spots for important buildings: the first Church building in Missouri on August 2, 1831, and the site for the future temple on August 3.¹⁶ The construction of the "house" that would serve as a school and place for church meetings in Kaw Township began by a ceremony in which twelve men representing the twelve tribes of Israel laid the first log. The wording used by the prophet to describe what the building would be for that area of Zion is informative to understanding his vision for buildings and congregations in the headquarters: "the first log, for a house, as a foundation of Zion in Kaw Township."¹⁷ The church building was to be a "foundation of Zion". They held a conference on August 4 in an already-established building that would be important for the Saints in Jackson County: the home of Joshua Lewis, a Missouri convert. In typical fashion for this period of Church history, the home of a member became the meeting place for the branch surrounding it until a designated church building could be erected.

¹⁵ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 162-163.

¹⁶ Jennings, "Zion is Fled", 38.

¹⁷ Berrett, *Sacred Places*, 96.

Many homes of saints in Jackson County were used as places of worship, including Orrin Porter Rockwell's¹⁸ in Blue River and Joseph Knight's¹⁹ in Independence. As hundreds of Mormon settlers moved to the frontier Zion, there was a tremendous amount of work to be done in building homes and getting crops planted. One indication of the Saints' commitment to Zion is that even in their brief stay there, they managed to build *any* church buildings. One was a small log building on the corner of the temple lot in Independence.²⁰ Another was the building mentioned above that was begun by Joseph in his first visit to Missouri. A third school was built near the historic Cave Spring not far from the Whitmer settlement on the Big Blue.²¹ The temple, though never built, showed the plan for even more and superior Church buildings. The plat for the city of Zion²² shows a planned twenty-four "temples" at the center that were to be community centers used for worship, social activities and administration.²³ In the time spent in Jackson County from 1831-1833, however, the Saints carved out their

¹⁸ Berrett, *Sacred Places*, 90.

¹⁹ Cannon, *Far West Record*, 51.

²⁰ Emily Dow Partridge Young, "What I Remember", Americana Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 10.

²¹ Jennings, "Zion" 57.

²² Plat of the City of Zion, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 25, 2013, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/plat-of-the-city-of-zion-circa-august-1833>.

²³ Barrett, *Restoration*, 238.

existence on the frontier and met mostly outdoors when weather permitted or in homes when it did not.²⁴

Leadership in Jackson County. With so much emphasis on consecration for the saints in Zion, it is no surprise that the church leader put in charge of facilitating the temporal side of consecration was also the de facto spiritual leader for the duration of the stay in Jackson County. Edward Partridge was the first bishop of the church. In 1833, this assumed role of the general leader for the area was clarified by the other leaders in a council meeting as recorded in their minutes: "Bishop Edward Partridge was ... the head of the Church of Zion"²⁵. His ecclesiastical position in Zion was roughly analogous to that of a modern stake president.

Aside from Bishop Partridge, the Saints did not have clearly defined leaders to preside over the conglomerate during the first two years of their time in Jackson County. Then, on March 26, 1833, seven high priests were appointed by the Prophet to preside over the Church in Zion. All of these seven men had been meeting with a council of High Priests for a year²⁶, discussing matters of Church business: Oliver Cowdery, W.W. Phelps, John Whitmer, Sidney Gilbert, Edward Partridge, Isaac Morley, and John Corrill.²⁷ These seven men were charged to "appoint presiding Elders, to take

²⁴ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 345.

²⁵ Cannon, *Far West Record*, 65.

²⁶ Cannon, *Far West Record*, 49.

²⁷ *History of the Church* 1:335-336.

the watchcare of the several branches"²⁸ in Missouri. It seems from the records that the seven High Priests did not officially make the appointments for those to preside over the branches until September 1833. The minutes from the March 26, 1833, meeting do indicate the directive was "accepted after much discussion. Resolved that the Churches meet according to the appointments of the several highpriests [sic] stationed over their respective branches."²⁹ However, no mention is made of which High Priests or Elders were chosen to preside or if it was referring to the seven in charge of making the appointments.

The practice of having regional leaders appoint leaders of congregations is similar to how bishops and branch presidents are chosen in the Church today: they are nominated by the Stake President and appointed by the First Presidency. This tiered leadership was well-adapted for the growth they were experiencing – from 402 in the spring of 1832³⁰ to 1,200 in July of 1833.³¹

While "presiding Elder" had been a term associated with the leader of the Church in a particular area since Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were sustained as such on April 6, 1830, a significant change was made in congregational leadership in

²⁸ *History of the Church*, 1:336.

²⁹ Cannon, *Far West Record*, 61.

³⁰ Jennings, "Zion is Fled", 63.

³¹ T. Edgar Lyon, "Independence, Missouri and the Mormons, 1827-1833," *BYU Studies* 13:1 (Autumn 1972): 17.

Jackson County—from Elders presiding over branches to High Priests presiding.³² An April 13, 1833 letter from Joseph Smith to John Carter gives insight into the shift from Elders to High Priests, “The duty of a High Priest is to administer in spiritual and holy things, and to hold communion with God; but not to exercise monarchical government, or to appoint meetings for the Elders without their consent. And again, it is the High Priests’ duty to be better qualified to teach principles and doctrines than the Elders.”³³

The list of branch presidents contains some well-known and admired early leaders:

Branch Number	Presiding High Priest	Settlement
1	Newel Knight	Colesville
2	Daniel Stanton	Prairie
3	David Whitmer	Whitmer
4	John Corrill	Independence
5	Thomas Marsh	Blue River
6	Peter Dustin	Blue River
7	Lyman Wight	Prairie
8	Parley P Pratt	Colesville
9	Simeon Carter	Blue River
10	Calvin Beebe	Independence ³⁴

³² Cannon, *Far West Record*, 65.

³³ Letter to John Sims Carter, April 13, 1833, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 24, 2013, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-john-sims-carter-13-april-1833>.

³⁴ Cannon, *Far West Record*, 65.

The peak number of branches organized was ten (averaging a little over one hundred members per branch – a far cry from the 800 envisioned for the future city of Zion).³⁵ There were probably more branches than were strictly needed at the time, but the organization and leadership was established with the future in mind. Though the area was perhaps oversaturated with congregations and presiding officers at the time, the development of branches and the leadership of those branches in Jackson County demonstrate that the Saints intended to stay and expand in their promised Zion.

The Saints at this time did not know that they would not live to see Zion built as expected. The people had been told in a revelation in August 1831 that the glory of Zion would “follow after much tribulation” (D&C 58:3). It is doubtful any mortal understood the level of tribulation that would fall on the people living in Zion. Due to an array of irreconcilable conflicts that festered between the Latter-day Saints and their Missourian neighbors, the agitated old settlers forced all Mormons out of Jackson County in 1833. The conflict came to a head with an ultimatum and some violence towards the Saints in the summer of 1833, then angry mobs forced the struggling Saints out of their homes and out of the county in November.³⁶ Most of the Saints took refuge in neighboring Clay County.

³⁵ Barrett, *Joseph Smith*, 238.

³⁶ Church Educational System, *Church History in the Fullness of Times* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 127.

Clay County 1833-1836

Meetings in Clay County. The exiled Saints facing winter in a new area were in disarray. In a letter dated December 15, 1833, and published in the Church newspaper, W.W. Phelps expressed that “The situation of the saints, as scatered, is dubious, and affords a gloomy prospect. No regular order can be enforced; nor any usual discipline kept up”.³⁷ Apparently the necessity of going where shelter and sustenance could be found took its toll on keeping branches together and holding regular meetings. Phelps also wrote to his associates in Ohio that the Saints who were scattered in Clay and surrounding counties “cannot hear from each other oftener then we do from you”.³⁸ The beleaguered exiles were certainly wary of attracting the same animosity the Jackson County residents held, and at least early on big public meetings were on hold. Phelps continued, “when they are discreet little or no persecution is felt.”³⁹ In early July 1834 the Church leaders in Clay County directed the local congregations not to hold public meetings.⁴⁰ Because prior to this there were not many public meetings being held, the instruction was more of a reiteration and validation of the unspoken policy since they were driven out of Jackson County.

³⁷ William W. Phelps, “Later from Missouri” *Evening and Morning Star*, 2:16, January, 1834.

³⁸ Phelps, “Later from Missouri.”

³⁹ Phelps, “Later from Missouri.”

⁴⁰ Parkin, “Clay County”, 234.

This restriction did not last long as Edward Partridge and Orson Pratt, two of the leaders selected to go instruct the Saints on a variety of issues including holding off on public meetings, reported on their assignment. In their July 31 report, they recommended that the congregations be allowed to again hold public meetings. The rest of the leadership agreed with the recommendation but encouraged a number of considerations their members would take to maintain relationships with the residents of Clay County, including the cessation of the gift of tongues, living modest Christian lives and being careful to make friends rather than enemies of their neighbors.⁴¹ The previous counsel to not gather seemed to be a reaction to the atrocities they had suffered in Jackson County; after a few months' separation from the events, they proceeded, though with caution, to begin meeting again. They would not let the failure and mistreatment of the past dictate the progress of the future.

Meetings for the duration of their stay in Clay County went on much like meetings in Jackson County had. There were, however, a few differences. Since the Saints were so spread out, and perhaps also due to a lingering worry about the hostility that meeting together had caused previously, there were more family meetings in lieu of larger congregational meetings. John Whitmer, for example, attended councils and conferences, but spent his Sabbaths "at home."⁴² Others, like those of the Colesville

⁴¹ Parkin, "Clay County," 234-235.

⁴² Parkin, "Clay County," 222.

Branch that settled together, met regularly, as Emily Austin recorded: "On the Sabbath and one evening every week the church assembled for worship."⁴³

Branches in Clay County. Some formal branches were formed in Clay County while other congregations met together without an official formation of a branch throughout their sojourn in the county. The conditions required people to settle where they could survive, stringing the settlements across a twenty-five mile strip in Clay County.⁴⁴ No more evidence is needed to demonstrate the separating effect of carving out an existence in Clay County than to look at the cohesive Colesville Branch. Even that tight-knit group, after a time of attempting to settle all together, was obliged to split up temporarily in order to find sufficient land to rent.⁴⁵

There were over a dozen settlements in Clay County, only some of which had official branches. Settlements with established branches included the Colesville, Hulet, Wight, Phelps, Morley and likely the Partridge and Allred settlements.⁴⁶ Other settlements did not have regular branches, such as the Chase settlement, which a Mormon settler said, "did not have a regularly organized branch, [but] they had preaching and prayer services".⁴⁷ Other settlements that likely followed this same

⁴³ Emily Austin, *Mormonism, or, Life Among the Mormons* (Madison: J. Cantwell, 1882), 79.

⁴⁴ Berrett, *Sacred Places*, 162.

⁴⁵ Berrett, *Sacred Places*, 167-168.

⁴⁶ Berrett, *Sacred Places*, 167-212.

⁴⁷ John Brush, "John Brush Biography, by His Friends," *Autumn Leaves, Published for the Youth of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, volume 4, 1891, 65.

pattern were the Lowry, Upper Shoal Creek, Abbott, Holbrook, Gilbert and Turner and East Branch settlements.⁴⁸ Even as refugees the Saints had a Zion-like need for gathering, whether or not they had a regular branch.

Church buildings and meeting places in Clay County. Larger branch or congregational meetings were usually held outdoors at a member's home, or inside the home in inclement weather. There are exceptions to this pattern in a few settlements where larger buildings were constructed or purchased. The Colesville Branch built a large log building called the "White House" that was used for meetings and also housed eight families. This whitewashed, spacious building attracted curious "Gentiles", according to Emily Austin, and "some of our Gentile neighbors would attend meeting on the Sabbath, probably through curiosity, as it is my opinion they never entered a place of worship in all their life before."⁴⁹ Smaller family meetings in all of the settlements were held in the homes of the Saints.

Leadership in Clay County. The way branch leaders operated was essentially the same as in Jackson County, except there were more unofficial leaders in settlements where there was no appointed branch leader. John Brush illustrated a situation like this: "Father Chase, being the oldest elder in the community, took the lead in spiritual matters and called upon all those who had been ordained to offices in Jackson county to come forward and work in their offices. This they willingly did and the Saints were

⁴⁸ Berrett, *Sacred Places*, 189-212.

⁴⁹ Austin, *Mormonism*, 80.

regularly visited, all maintaining cheerfulness under their trials and looking for the speedy redemption of Zion.”⁵⁰ The most significant change in leadership was in the organization of the Stake Presidency and High Council. Joseph Smith, who had arrived with Zion’s Camp, met with Church leaders in Missouri to make the organization in late June or early July 1834.⁵¹ The High Council and their President and two assistants (positions later known as a Stake Presidency) were to settle “important business that might come before them, which could not be settled by the Bishop and his council.”⁵² The High Council “administered the affairs of the Church in Missouri. It issued recommends, ordained priesthood officers, rendered instructions, issued licenses to preach, disciplined members, and regulated the Church.”⁵³ Stakes and stake officers would be vital for mid-level management as the Saints built their Zion.

Northern Missouri 1836-1839

Clay County turned out to be a temporary stopping place, as many supposed, but the Saints’ exit was not made because they were to finally receive their land in Jackson County; rather, the residents of Clay County required them to leave. It was further north, rather than back to Jackson in the south, that the Saints once again put down roots. The exodus northward took place in August 1836.⁵⁴ In a compromise

⁵⁰ John Brush, *Autumn Leaves*, 4:65.

⁵¹ Parkin, “Clay County,” 227.

⁵² *History of the Church*, 2:122-123.

⁵³ Parkin, “Clay County,” 238.

⁵⁴ Gentry, “Northern Missouri,” 39.

designed to solve the “Mormon problem”, the Missouri legislature passed a bill on December 29, 1836, creating two new counties: Caldwell and Daviess.⁵⁵ The Missourians saw Caldwell County as the Mormon county—the Mormons would move there and only there. The Saints quickly bought up land and settled in Caldwell, but their rapid growth and plans for the future caused them to spill out into other surrounding Counties, including Daviess. Despite glimmering moments -- such as a view of northern Missouri as a new Zion and the centralizing of the Church leadership with the move of Joseph Smith and other Saints from Ohio— the years from 1836 to 1839 were characterized more by trials than utopia. The continued and intensified hardships of this period stunted further development of the Latter-day Saint congregation.

Church buildings and meeting places in northern Missouri. Though the trials of this time limited the construction of what otherwise would have been built at the Church headquarters, Caldwell County was viewed as more than just a temporary resting spot, so church building projects were more substantial than in Clay County. However, not many Church buildings were completed in the two years of peace in northern Missouri since the time was spent mostly on building cabins and other dwelling places. As the thousands of Saints poured in to the new Church headquarters, there were times when more than one cabin was built per day.⁵⁶ As in the previous Missouri periods, the homes of the Saints were the primary meeting places. One Latter-day Saint woman

⁵⁵ Gentry, “Northern Missouri,” 42.

⁵⁶ Gentry, “Northern Missouri,” 156.

summarized the building projects: "Upon a delightful and sightly location the city of Far West was surveyed and soon a beautiful and thriving town sprang up as if by magic. The Latter-day Saints, with their habits of industry and thrift, in a little time were established in comfortable and happy homes and the voice of praise and thankfulness to the Almighty was heard in their abodes and in newly erected places of worship."⁵⁷

The work on the temple in Far West showed the dedication to making Zion in northern Missouri, even if they still expected to make it back to Jackson County to build Zion there too. Though the Saints were never able to complete it because of financial difficulties⁵⁸ and so many other imminent projects at hand, the walls were eventually built up to two-and-a-half feet tall.⁵⁹ One major project that was completed, though not quite as ambitious as the temple, was the school/meetinghouse just north of the temple lot in Far West. It was built in 1836 and used as a major meeting place for religious and community purposes. Then a newer, larger building was completed in 1838. A non-Mormon visitor said of the meeting and meeting place that "the church was a large frame building, with seats well arranged and a good pulpit. We were treated with great politeness.... The congregation was large, very orderly, and attentive. There were

⁵⁷Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints* (Logan: Utah Journal Company, 1888), 33.

⁵⁸ Gentry, "Northern Missouri," 63-64.

⁵⁹ Gentry, "Northern Missouri," 95.

officers to show people to their seats, who were most polite and efficient in the discharge of their duties."⁶⁰

Branches and leadership in northern Missouri. There was little progression in how congregations were formed from 1836-1839 in northern Missouri. Between the conflict with the Missourians at this time, the strife caused by apostates and the challenge of settling yet again in new territory leaves little wonder that there was no effort to organize branches in as orderly a fashion as in Jackson County. There were dozens of settlements peopled largely if not exclusively by Latter-day Saints, but apparently only a few of them had formal branches established by the time they were driven out. Settlements like the Log Creek Settlement had a formal branch,⁶¹ but the lack of evidence of established branches in other settlements suggests that there were many groups who never were organized into official congregations.

The president of the Log Creek Branch was William Draper, a high priest.⁶² Being a high priest seems to have been preferred in order to lead a branch, as evidenced by William Draper's comment on being asked to preside. He quipped, "in a short time I was called upon to take the presidency of this branch being the only high priest in the branch."⁶³

⁶⁰ Peter Burnett, as quoted in Berrett, *Sacred Places*, 315.

⁶¹ Berrett, *Sacred Places*, 292.

⁶² William Draper, *Autobiography*, Americana Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 4.

⁶³ Draper, *Autobiography*, 7.

One significant expansion in organization and leadership in this period was the formation and planning of new stakes. The September 17, 1837 minutes from the Kirtland Council demonstrate the perceived need for more organization in Northern Missouri, "It appeared manifest to the conference that the places appointed for the gathering of the Saints were at this time crowded to overflowing & that it was necessary that there be more Stakes of Zion appointed in order that the poor might have a place to gather to. Wherefore it was moved seconded & carried by vote of the whole that Presidents J Smith Jr & S. Rigdon be requested by this conference to go & appoint other Stakes or places of gathering."⁶⁴ The Adam-ondi-Ahman Stake with John Smith as the president was organized on 28 June 1838.⁶⁵ This stake was to cover all of Daviess County as the church grew there. This stake did not last long since they would be driven out just months later. Another stake and city of Zion was planned (but never developed) fifteen miles north of Far West⁶⁶ and was to be called Seth.⁶⁷

Despite the hardships of this period, the Saints saw their new home in Northern Missouri as Zion, or at very least important Stakes of Zion. As recorded in the Kirtland Elder's Quorum Record, Reuben Hadlock spoke at a meeting in the Kirtland Temple on February 26, 1838 about Northern Missouri as if it were Zion. "Pres Hadlock made

⁶⁴ Kirtland Council Minute Book, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, 243-45.

⁶⁵ Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:38-39.

⁶⁶ Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:67-68.

⁶⁷ Albert Rockwood, "The Last Months of Mormonism in Missouri: The Albert Perry Rockwood Journal," Edited by Dean C. Jessee and David J. Whittaker, *BYU Studies*, 26:1 (1988), 22.

some remarks Concerning moving to Zion.”⁶⁸ While the minutes do not specifically say that he is speaking of Far West and its environs, the Feb 26, 1838 date eliminates the possibility that he was talking about Jackson or Clay Counties. George Averett wrote of his time in Far West as being in Zion as well. “My father rented some corn that had bin plantid before he arrive at Forewest [Far West], razing some of the beste Corn and Sod that I ever beheld razed on Sod land.... This Land Seamed to be a chois Land in every Deede and to the writer of theas line[s] this Lande seemed to be a heaven in every deede[.] Everything seamed to smile with blessings too numeras for my pen to describe or my tunge to express[.] Althou[gh] but a small Boy I rejoised excedingly in this Land of Zion and felte to give God the Praze and to bow befour him on My bendid Nees and to Call on his Great Name fer his blesing and to thank him for the lite of the Gospel and for the Manny Greate blesings which he was blesing on us with in that Goodly land of Zion.”⁶⁹ Certainly if left unmolested, the Saints would have more fully organized the stakes, branches and their leadership had they been permitted to stay.

Meetings in northern Missouri. During the periods of peace, Sabbath and other religious meetings continued in much the same pattern as they had in the other areas in Missouri. As the Mormon population grew, so did the number and size of meetings

⁶⁸ Lyndon W. Cook and Milton V. Backman, eds, *Kirtland Elders' Quorum Record 1836-1841* (Provo: Grandin Book Co., 1985), 40.

⁶⁹ George Washington Gill Averett, “Biographical Sketch of George Washington Gill Averett,” typescript, Americana Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, 4.

held in Northern Missouri. In the new location, a renewed enthusiasm for gathering flourished. While most accounts of this time address settling and building, meeting together continued to be a defining part of the Saints' life in their new home. John Brush relayed this account, "During the summer of 1836 the Saints at Plum Creek went regularly each Sunday to Far West to meeting. As but few had teams and these worked hard during the week, all thought it best to walk the distance, and thus Sunday after Sunday quite a crowd of men, women and children could be seen wending their way toward the central city."⁷⁰

Small, family meetings as well as large, community meetings in good weather were the order of the day. Women continued to attend meetings, but official participation was still limited like in Ohio. Far West was the site of many important meetings, including one on June 17, 1838, where Sidney Rigdon gave an inflammatory speech known as the "Salt Sermon."⁷¹ Apparently aimed at the apostates living in Northern Missouri, this speech set into motion a number of actions that would have far-reaching effects for the Church in Missouri. It is beyond the scope of this study to detail the contents or results, but the fact that the sermon had such a drastic effect underscores the importance of meetings at this time. Perhaps this sermon and the one given a short

⁷⁰ John Brush, *Autumn Leaves*, 4:127.

⁷¹ Gentry, "Northern Missouri," 58.

time later on July 4, 1838, are examples of how the freedom of extemporaneous sermons occasionally did more harm than good.⁷²

Not all Mormon meetings were filled with fire and brimstone. A comparison of meetings from a young Mormon boy who lived in Plumb Creek, a settlement near the Saints' headquarters in the city of Far West, gives insight about the reverence of Latter-day Saint meetings. "Once I was permitted to go to a Methodist Camp Meeting, and I used to think it funny to see them pass the hat to get money. I could not help contrasting the way they had of conducting their meeting to that of the Latter-day Saints. While our meetings are conducted with singing and prayer and intellectual talks, theirs were conducted, 'Come to the Anxious Seat,' 'Come to Jesus.' I would like to have seen which of the howlers was supposed to be Jesus."⁷³ John Brush said of the meetings in the summer of 1836, "The burden of the instruction given was exhortation to greater faithfulness and more strict compliance with the law, with warnings and prophecies concerning their future distress, if they did not."⁷⁴

⁷² Had Sidney Rigdon followed the counsel revealed in June of 1834 regarding the how the Saints in Missouri were to speak and act, the results of 1838 may have been very different. "And let all my people who dwell in the regions round about be very faithful, and prayerful, and humble before me... Talk not of judgments, neither boast of faith nor of mighty works" (D&C 105:23-24).

⁷³ Mosiah Lyman Hancock, "The Life Story of Mosiah Lyman Hancock," Americana Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, 4-5.

⁷⁴ John Brush, *Autumn Leaves*, 4:127.

Near the end of the Saints' stay in Northern Missouri, opposition to and restrictions on meetings came into play again. One convert lamented that "we were deprived of holding meetings of any kind. Joseph Smith, Sr. and Brigham Young were our principal counselors. We received two or three epistles from Joseph who was at that time in Liberty Jail, Clay County. Some few times in the course of the winter, we slyly congregated ourselves in a schoolhouse about two miles from Far West to receive instructions from Joseph and others."⁷⁵ John Butler, another Latter-day Saint living in Missouri, told of one meeting in December 1838 that was sabotaged by apostates. It was to be a prayer meeting for Joseph and Hiram "for the Lord to bless them and enable them to bear the cruelties that they had to suffer and pass through."⁷⁶ The appointed building was locked when those who arrived tried to go in – "some of the apostates had gotten there before them and that they had done it to break up their meeting. [Joseph Smith Sr.] called to them to open the door, but no one answered or took any notice whatever."⁷⁷ The meeting resumed in a different location and "those that were there said that they never saw such a meeting. The Lord was with them, and that to bless and answer their prayers."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Anson Call, "The Life and Record of Anson Call," Americana Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, 5.

⁷⁶John Lowe Butler, *Autobiography*, Americana Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, 16.

⁷⁷ Butler, *autobiography*, 16.

⁷⁸ Butler, *autobiography*, 16.

Conclusion

Zion, the place of peace and refuge, was the desire of Saints in Missouri in the 1830s. Their working towards establishing Zion is demonstrated by their following inspired leadership in congregational worship. In Jackson County, when the fervor of Zion was the strongest, the most significant advancements in branch organization and leadership, as well as building projects, were accomplished. Branches, meetings and buildings in 1833-1836 in Clay County indicate a wary people, waiting to move back to their rightful inheritance. The period from 1836-1839 in northern Missouri, primarily Caldwell and Daviess Counties, points to a battered but determined body of Saints who laid down an organization, built buildings and held meetings as swiftly as circumstances would allow -- always with a mind toward Zion.

Chapter 4

“Let Them Come to This Place”: Congregations in Nauvoo

A complex set of circumstances combined against the saints in Missouri in 1839. Angry apostates, unwise church members and hateful or worried Missourians all played parts in the drama that ended with the Mormon people being driven out of their homes and out of the state of Missouri in the early winter months of 1839. Their beloved prophet Joseph was incarcerated in Liberty Jail, and many saints felt abandoned. Their burning hope for Zion was, for many, dimmed to the point of extinguishment.

Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, two of the higher-ranking church leaders not incarcerated, led the evacuation of Missouri. The saints fled to the more familiar and less dangerous east, crossing the Mississippi to Illinois. There they found a citizenry who helped care for them and condemned the actions of the Missourians.¹ The people in Quincy, Illinois, and elsewhere in that state hoped an influx of refugees would help their economy and their various political parties.²

¹ *History of the Church*, 3:272.

² CES, *Church History in the Fullness*, 213.

Though many settled temporarily in this area of Illinois, some saints were unsure if it was wise to gather again.³ Coming off the bitter experiences in Missouri and Ohio, their wariness to settling in close proximity is certainly understandable. Sidney Rigdon and Edward Partridge were among the more vocal opponents,⁴ while Wandle Mace, Elias Higbee and William Marks were outspoken supporters of immediate gathering.⁵

Congregations

Worries and opinions aside, the fleeing saints still needed to survive, and they settled temporarily wherever they could find refuge. Quincy, Illinois, was bursting with Mormon refugees in the winter and early spring of 1838-39. Numerous other settlements and towns were inhabited by the homeless saints in this difficult period, but Quincy was the pro tempore headquarters. In a March 5, 1839, letter to Joseph Smith, Edward Partridge wrote of Quincy, "This place is full of our people, yet they are scattering off nearly all the while.... Some of the leading men have given us [that is the Saints] an invitation to settle in and about this place. Many no doubt will stay here."⁶

Joseph Smith's response to Partridge's letter validated what the Saints had been doing in regards to settling and also gave more direction. Smith wrote, "Our brethren scattered abroad, who understand the spirit of the gathering, ... fall into the places and refuge of safety that God shall open unto them, between Kirtland and Far West. ... Let

³ *History of the Church*, 3:260.

⁴ CES, *Church History in the Fullness*, 215.

⁵ *History of the Church*, 3:260-261.

⁶ *History of the Church*, 3:272-273.

them fall in somewhere between those two boundaries, in the most safe and quiet places they can find; and let this be the present understanding until God shall open a more effectual door for us for further considerations.”⁷

In the March 17th conference at Quincy, Young "advise[d] the Saints to settle (if possible) in companies, or in a situation so as to be organized into branches of the Church, that they might be nourished and fed by the shepherds, for without, the sheep would be scattered.”⁸ In spite of the counsel, the saints were unclear about what their leaders expected of them and were split in their feelings about gathering again.⁹

Rumors at the end of January were, as Albert Rockwell recorded, that “the Prophet’s advice for the brethren [was] to scatter, hold no meetings in this place, and be wise servants that the wrath of the enemy be not kindled against us.”¹⁰

During this time of uncertainty, some saints met in small family groups while some braved larger gatherings, such as in Wandle Mace’s rented home on the outskirts of Quincy. This period was reminiscent of the time spent in Clay County—a resting place where the saints wondered and waited for what would come next. Unlike the Clay County stay from 1833-1836, it appears that no branches were officially formed—in Quincy or the nearby area where the saints settled in late 1838 or early 1839. This was most likely due to the short time they spent in Quincy, with most of the resources and

⁷ *History of the Church*, 3:301.

⁸ *History of the Church*, 3:283.

⁹ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 55.

¹⁰ Albert P. Rockwood, as quoted in Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 55.

energy of the saints being spent on survival and relocating all remaining saints from Missouri. Because it was the hub of Mormon activity for a short time and many leaders resided there, the saints in Quincy functioned like a branch though no official branch was organized.¹¹

More direction and leadership were forthcoming at the end of the difficult winter. In response to letters inquiring what the Prophet would have the saints do in regards to gathering again, Joseph Smith instructed them in a March 20 letter not to scatter, but to go through with a purchase proposed by Isaac Galland, a land speculator.¹² Land acquired in this purchase would become the next great church center, Nauvoo. Joseph and his fellow prisoners were allowed to escape prison in April 1839 and arrived in Quincy on the 22nd of that month.¹³ On April 30 and May 1, 1839, Joseph Smith completed the land purchases which included Commerce, Illinois (Nauvoo), and huge tracts of land on the Iowa side of the Mississippi.¹⁴

Nauvoo Stake and Wards. It was not long before the newly acquired area in Illinois became the focal point for the Church. In a public letter on July 1, Smith called upon the saints to migrate to the new site.¹⁵ The following October conference was an important moment in the development of Mormon congregations, because it was here

¹¹ A stake would be organized there on 25 October 1840. See *History of the Church*, 4:233.

¹² Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 57.

¹³ CES, *Church History in the Fullness*, 215.

¹⁴ *History of the Church*, 3:342.

¹⁵ CES, *Church History in the Fullness*, 217.

that the Nauvoo stake was formed. Significantly, at the formation of this stake, there was also the birth of a unit in the church that would become critical in future organization: the ward. Three wards were created, namely Upper, Middle and Lower. A stake across the Mississippi in Iowa was also created;¹⁶ it would come to be called the Zarahemla stake. With fewer members in the Iowa stake, no wards were created at this time.

The term “ward” has different connotations for different demographics. For a Latter-day Saint, the word immediately invokes thoughts of an organized church congregation, but a person unfamiliar with the church from the eastern United States may think of political boundaries. Indeed, in 1839 and today, wards are political subdivisions of a city, particularly in the north-eastern United States.¹⁷ These Nauvoo wards were no exception – they were understood to be civic rather than ecclesiastical groupings.

Nauvoo started out with three wards, then changed to four wards in early 1841, and then in August 1842, expanded significantly to ten wards.¹⁸ At the reorganizing into four wards on March 1, 1841, the city council was the group deciding the issue.¹⁹ The fact that it was the city council rather than the high council or some other church

¹⁶ *History of the Church*, 4:12.

¹⁷ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 362.

¹⁸ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 365-366.

¹⁹ *History of the Church*, 4:305.

leadership group highlights that these wards were truly municipal units rather than ecclesiastical ones.

An interesting and subtle shift seems to take place between the time wards were first formed in 1839 and when Nauvoo was split into ten wards at the end of 1842.

On Sunday, December 4, 1842, "The High Council of Nauvoo met, heard, accepted, and adopted the report of their committee for dividing the city into ten wards."²⁰ While this may have more to do with the High Council having a bigger part in civic matters than wards being more tied to the church, there were at least a few other indications that, to some degree, wards were identifying a little bit more on a religious stage.

For example, the month after this final split into ten wards with a bishop over each, a special meeting for fasting and thanksgiving was called for, to be organized by the bishops and during which collections were to be gathered.²¹ A little more than two years after the formation of wards, at least one bishop, John S. Higbee, organized ward meetings, starting ward prayer meetings in early 1845. He appointed a different brother to take charge at these Thursday meetings, but at times apparently took some time for the instruction of his ward.²²

Notwithstanding the difference in wards having at least some identity as religious entities, they never became the fundamental church unit in Nauvoo. Wards

²⁰ *History of the Church*, 5:199.

²¹ *History of the Church*, 5:249

²² Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 366-367.

continued to function in civic capacities. For example, in December 1843 the wards all met as wards, but it was to pass resolutions on raising a police force.²³ They met again later to decide about payment of police in April 1844.²⁴

Without wards or individual organized branches to provide the setting for worship in the church, the saints followed the pattern of previous church centers in worshipping all together. Nauvoo became something like one giant congregation. Farming families living outside Nauvoo and those in nearby towns would often make the journey into Nauvoo to participate in religious services.²⁵ The Saints who at first had been timid about gathering because of the persecutions they underwent in Missouri largely embraced this new, thriving center. Coming on the heels of their Zion disappointment in Missouri, and while still looking forward to a time when Zion in Missouri would be redeemed, the saints found new hope and vitality in another settlement that seemed to have the makings of God's chosen city. An August 1842 Church newspaper article in England reflected the Saints' view of Nauvoo as a new Zion. "Nauvoo, then, is the nucleus of a glorious dominion of universal liberty, peace, and plenty; it is an organization of that government of which there shall be no end--of that kingdom of Messiah which shall roll forth, from conquering and to conquer, until it shall be said, that 'the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord,

²³ *History of the Church*, 6:110.

²⁴ *History of the Church*, 6:332.

²⁵ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 61.

and of his Christ,' 'and the Saints of the Most High shall possess the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven.'"²⁶

Though not officially split into branches within Nauvoo, the sheer number of people there (more than 3,000 by January 1841²⁷) and the inability to meet all together in times of poor weather contributed in the formation of self-defined clusters of families and friends, neighbors and fellow citizens.²⁸ On January 7, 1844, "the Twelve Apostles attended meetings and preached in different parts of the city."²⁹ Presumably these visits were to these types of unofficial clusters. A week later the twelve were preaching again at private houses in various parts of the city.³⁰

Of necessity, non-English speaking groups of immigrants formed their own branches in Nauvoo. In December 1843 a German branch³¹ was formed so the German converts could hear the gospel taught in their native language. They were officially organized with a presiding elder, Daniel Garn, chosen to lead them.³² While not under the same need as foreign language speaking immigrants, English saints had an

²⁶ Editorial, "Government and Institutions of Nauvoo," Vol. 3, No. 4 *Millennial Star* (August 4, 1842), 69.

²⁷ *History of the Church*, 4:268.

²⁸ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 174.

²⁹ *History of the Church*, 6:171.

³⁰ *History of the Church*, 6:176.

³¹ Though not in Nauvoo, the Norwegian saints in La Salle County, Illinois were similarly organized in a branch to accommodate the teaching and administering in their native language. *History of the Church*, 5:395.

³² *History of the Church*, 6:103.

unofficial English gathering place five miles east of Nauvoo.³³ Being uprooted from home and adapting to a newly embraced Mormon culture was taxing. It must have been refreshing for the British implants in Nauvoo to meet together.

Between the time of expulsion from Northern Missouri and April 1841, when a major emphasis on gathering to Nauvoo would be enacted, Saints were encouraged to settle wherever they wanted from Iowa to Kirtland, forming branches and stakes³⁴ as growing membership warranted. At the October conference in 1840, it was decided that “There being several applications for the appointment of stakes, it was Resolved: That a committee be appointed to organize stakes between this place and Kirtland.”³⁵ Later that month, the committee organized three stakes, including one in Quincy.³⁶

³³ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 128.

³⁴ It is important to note here that the terminology surrounding congregations differed from then to now. “During the nineteenth century, just about any local unit could be and was called a branch. Branches, in fact, predated the formation of the first stakes (1834) and wards (1839). But even after the latter date, a ward or stake might be called a branch. We read, for instance, of the Nauvoo Third Ward Branch. The term *ward* sometimes was used just as imprecisely, as for example aboard immigrant ships, where the passengers were divided into wards, each with a presiding elder. In 1847, New Orleans was divided into four wards, and over each were teachers who were responsible to that city’s presiding elder. Similarly, the term *stake* had many meanings. A branch might be called a stake. Units similar to present-day missions were designated as stakes. St. George, for example, is termed a stake many years before an official stake is organized. What is the point? Simply that no one should be troubled when reading that a unit was designated a branch, a ward, or a stake when the unit fails to match our current precise definitions of those terms.” Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 356.

³⁵ *History of the Church*, 4:205

³⁶ *History of the Church*, 4:233.

There were many areas of growth, but none exceeded Nauvoo, nor were the immediate plans for the other stakes and branches as grand. Joseph Smith and the other church leaders wanted to build up the Kingdom of God, starting with the City Beautiful. By mid 1841, it was clear that in order to accomplish the kind of building projects and growth envisioned for Nauvoo, a greater emphasis would have to be placed on gathering there. So in May 1841, Smith and the other leaders in Nauvoo resolved that all stakes outside Hancock County, Illinois, and Lee County, Iowa, were to be discontinued.³⁷ The saints were instructed to come to Nauvoo as circumstances would permit. Even the Zarahemla Stake in Iowa was made into a branch in January 1842.³⁸

The discontinuance of outside stakes was not a permanent policy. However, there was immediate need for more people in the central stake of the Church to help build up Zion. Once the critical mass of saints was there and the important building projects were staffed adequately, the Prophet reemphasized the idea that all of America is Zion and should be filled with stakes and branches. At the April conference in 1844, Joseph Smith stated, "The whole of America is Zion itself from north to south, and is described by the Prophets, who declare that it is the Zion where the mountain of the Lord should be, and it should be in the center of the land.... I have received instructions from the Lord that from henceforth wherever the Elders of Israel shall build up

³⁷ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 82.

³⁸ *History of the Church*, 4:493.

churches and branches unto the Lord throughout the States, there shall be a stake of Zion. In the great cities, as Boston, New York &c., there shall be stakes.”³⁹ After Joseph’s death, Brigham Young took this vision a step further and planned to organize all of the United States into church districts with a high priest over each district to administer and call conferences.⁴⁰ This did not come to full fruition before they were driven out of Nauvoo, however.

The process for building up branches into stakes was well summarized by historian William Hartley: “A branch first received a president and then, when needed, a high council and a bishop, and at that point it was considered an operational stake. As membership numbers or geography made them necessary, a second, a third and more bishops were added. An elders quorum and at least one Aaronic Priesthood unit completed a stake’s organization.”⁴¹ Bishops roles will be discussed more fully in the section on leadership below.

Some of the smaller branches outside the Nauvoo area fluctuated in size due to moves, baptisms, apostasies, etc. These branches that were formed perhaps in consequence of scattering from Missouri or missionary work at times formed “union branches,” which were conglomerates of smaller branches meeting together in order to

³⁹ *History of the Church*, 6:318-319.

⁴⁰ *History of the Church*, 7:251.

⁴¹ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 362.

provide enough people for a congregation.⁴² Though outside the headquarters, and therefore not a focus of this study, this innovation of banding smaller branches together shows the flexibility of congregations at this time.

Families and Priesthood Quorums. While understanding stakes, branches and wards is important in grasping church organization and congregations at this time, it is also important to realize that families, then and now, are really the most basic and fundamental church unit. Families were central in the mindset of the Nauvoo saints, and the priesthood-holding father was the official link to the church, often through his priesthood quorum.⁴³ Priesthood holders were "official members;" unordained men were "registered members,"⁴⁴ as were women and children.

Quorums served the function of providing a smaller setting of officially organized church members to meet and associate with, as well as a venue for receiving assignments and instruction. The male converts cascading into Nauvoo were of various priesthood offices: deacons, teachers, priests, elders, high priests, seventies, and apostles. In whatever way their quorums had been organized before, Nauvoo served as a place for further development. Indeed, "Nauvoo became a restarting point for priesthood quorums and labors interrupted elsewhere."⁴⁵ The Aaronic Priesthood and elders quorums were all under the direction of the Nauvoo Stake, but not the high

⁴² Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 71.

⁴³ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 221.

⁴⁴ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 68.

⁴⁵ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 363.

priests or seventies.⁴⁶ The Aaronic Priesthood quorums were organized on March 21, 1841.⁴⁷ While those quorums met occasionally, including some in combined meetings,⁴⁸ it was the elders quorum and more particularly the high priests and quorums of the seventies that provided a sense of belonging and instruction for the brethren in Nauvoo. Meetings in later 1844 seemed to be especially quorum-centric.⁴⁹ This was even more true in the winter months.⁵⁰

There were hundreds of Elders in and around Nauvoo, but keeping track of them was difficult since they were so often leaving on missionary journeys. In March 1841, the Elders quorum president in Nauvoo, John Hicks, published a notice to Elders everywhere that they should notify the quorum clerk of where they are living, “that we may know where to find them.”⁵¹ Also the notice requested that all elders who had been ordained seventies alert the clerk.⁵² High priests similarly struggled to keep track of their quorum members. They had one quorum in Nauvoo which met at least occasionally, but its records are far from abundant.

The priesthood office that provided the largest congregation-like feeling for Nauvoo men was the office of a seventy. The seventies quorums would even

⁴⁶ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 364.

⁴⁷ *History of the Church*, 5:169.

⁴⁸ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 370.

⁴⁹ B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Period 2: Apostolic Interregnum*, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1932), 7:327

⁵⁰ *History of the Church*, 7:362.

⁵¹ “To the Elders Scattered Abroad,” *Times and Seasons* vol. 2, March 1, 1841, 340.

⁵² Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 374-375.

eventually have their own hall to meet in, and these men were destined for great things in the eyes of the church leaders. Hartley notes, “Seventies were not local ministers but were considered General Authorities, traveling ministers, witnesses unto the Gentiles and in all the world, and ‘seventy apostles.’”⁵³ There was only one quorum of seventies before 1839, when the second and third quorums were organized. A few more quorums were added between then and fall of 1844, when Brigham Young enacted a large-scale expansion of the seventies quorums.⁵⁴

At the October conference where this change was announced, the seventies filled up to twelve quorums (eleven quorums with seventy members and the twelfth with forty). By early 1846, there were thirty-four quorums of the seventy. While it is not known exactly why such a massive expansion of the seventies took place at this time, William Hartley suggests that, “the goal seemed to be the creation of stakes throughout the United States, converted and organized by seventies, who would install the selected high priests as stake presidents. However, for reasons not explained, perhaps because of priorities given to finishing the temple, neither prong of the plan was pushed.”⁵⁵ By late 1846, about 80 percent of all priesthood holders in Nauvoo were seventies, by far the biggest priesthood group. Seventies quorums met for instruction and worship more

⁵³ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 376.

⁵⁴ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 376-377.

⁵⁵ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 378.

than the other quorums in this time period. Perhaps this reflected the Nauvoo Saints' grand vision of the churches future.

Other organizations that were formed in Nauvoo that would take on great importance in future congregations are the Relief Society, formed in March of 1842,⁵⁶ and the precursors to the Young Men and Young Women's organizations, which began April 1843.⁵⁷ These organizations provided camaraderie, opportunities for service and instruction on virtues and morality for the women and youth of the church.⁵⁸

Leadership

Joseph Smith. Nauvoo was an important place for Joseph Smith the prophet personally. It was there that he really blossomed in confidence and leadership, becoming much more of a public figure.⁵⁹ Historian Richard Bushman argues that "the Church ran on his vision and grit, and that he had to manufacture progress by sheer will."⁶⁰ Not only did the Prophet's visibility increase, but his speaking prowess expanded as well. In the Nauvoo period he was much less likely to stand behind a spokesman like Oliver Cowdery or Sidney Rigdon as he had in the past. The saints loved hearing from their prophet, which may be why there was not a more concerted move in Nauvoo to break into smaller congregations when they had the near-weekly

⁵⁶ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 223-225.

⁵⁷ *History of the Church*, 5:320.

⁵⁸ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 226.

⁵⁹ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 389-390.

⁶⁰ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 404.

opportunity to hear from Joseph. His presence drew thousands from across the United States and Europe to settle in the new Zion. His sermons were the highlight of the gathered saints' worship services.

Wilford Woodruff's account published in the Church newspapers of one Sabbath sermon given by the prophet gives insight into how powerful and adaptive to circumstances Joseph Smith's addresses were. "A large assembly of Saints gathered together at the place of meeting at an early hour, to hear a discourse delivered by president Joseph Smith, upon the subject of baptism. A Child of Mr. Windsor P. Lyons being deceased, the body of which lay before the assembly, called forth many remarks from the speaker upon the subject of death and the resurrection, which were in the highest degree interesting and edifying, as were also his remarks upon the subject of baptism."⁶¹

Charles Rich, a Nauvoo resident, recalled, "It was a happy time for us to once more feel at home among the Saints of God, and to be where we could hear words of comfort from the mouth of our Prophet Joseph Smith. For we were now where we could attend meetings every Sunday ... We were truly a thankful and humble people."⁶²

While Charles Rich's reminiscence of the power of the prophet's sermons is instructive,

⁶¹ Wilford Woodruff, "Sabbath Scene in Nauvoo or Sketch of a Discourse by President Jos. Smith," *Millennial Star*, Vol. 3, No. 4, August 4, 1842, 57.

⁶² Charles C. Rich as quoted in, Richard N. Holzapfel and T. Jeffery Cottle, *Old Mormon Nauvoo: 1839-1846: Historic Photographs and Guide* (Provo: Grandin Book Company, 1990), 49.

it could be argued that it is colored by the martyrdom. Joseph Fielding wrote a contemporary account in his journal two months before Smith's death that similarly pointed out the power of prophet's discourses. "April 6, 1844, our annual conference began and continued four days. Joseph's discourse on the origin of man, the nature of God and the resurrection were the most interesting matters of this time and any one that could not see in him the spirit of inspiration of God must be dark."⁶³

Though converted saints might be seen as having a biased opinion of Joseph's speaking abilities, he likewise impressed observers outside the faith. A non-Mormon reporter for a Christian journal heard Joseph speak in this time period when Joseph was in Washington. He said that Joseph was "an energetic, impassioned speaker." Another outside observer to Joseph's sermons on this trip said that he "displayed strongly a spirit of Charity and Forbearance."⁶⁴

Since Nauvoo was essentially one mega congregation, the general church leadership served, along with specific local leaders, as the leadership for the "branch." Joseph Smith was the driving force of Nauvoo and the central figure in the Nauvoo stake as well as the church as a whole. His decisions and directions, though influenced and guided by other leaders' counsel, carried enormous weight.

⁶³Joseph Fielding, transcribed and edited in Andrew F. Ehat, "'They Might Have Known That He Was Not a Fallen Prophet'--The Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding," *BYU Studies* 19:2 (Winter 1979), 140.

⁶⁴Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 395

The Twelve Apostles. The Twelve Apostles, with Brigham Young at the head, assumed the chief leadership role after the martyrdom in 1844. Prior to this, however, the quorum was viewed as a traveling council. Even with the clarification in 1841 that they had jurisdiction over High Councils, they were busy with foreign missions and helping the church in its more remote branches.

High Council. The council that more directly had the reins in Nauvoo was the high council. For sixteen months until the city of Nauvoo was granted its charter, the high council served in both ecclesiastical and civic roles.⁶⁵ In the saints' minds, as far as building Zion was concerned, "all things ... are spiritual" (D&C 29:34). Of the original twelve called on the Nauvoo high council, over half had served in that capacity before.⁶⁶ They met weekly on Sunday evenings to discuss issues and enact decisions.

The council started to shift to a totally religious role in 1841.⁶⁷ By February 1842 the shift was essentially complete. They became, as historian Glen Leonard put it, "Nauvoo's conscience and schoolmaster."⁶⁸ One important role the high council served that has followed through church history until today is the judicial function: deciding discipline for transgressors in the church. The high council in Nauvoo, like the previous high councils, was under the stake presidency. William Marks was appointed

⁶⁵ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 92.

⁶⁶ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 93.

⁶⁷ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 95.

⁶⁸ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 96.

to be the stake president⁶⁹ and served until October 1844, when he was replaced with John Smith, who had previously served as the stake president for the Zarahemla stake.⁷⁰ The stake presidency and high council in Nauvoo worked closely with Joseph Smith. Starting in the spring of 1840, Smith regularly attended high council meetings. The meetings were even moved to his own home as they “began to conduct certain business for the entire church.”⁷¹

The Nauvoo period further defined the relationship between the high council and the Twelve Apostles. Following the Apostles return from their mission to Britain in August of 1841, the formerly unclear connection between the “traveling high council” and the “standing high council” was brought into sharper relief: the Twelve were to have jurisdiction not just outside of stakes, but also as General Authorities within stakes, and therefore had authority over high councils. This was in accordance to the revelation which defined the Twelve as the “travelling, presiding council” (107:33)

The Nauvoo stake was a pattern for all potential stakes. William Hartley observed, “For that generation, a branch was a stake, albeit a stake in embryo.” When a branch was formed it was assigned a president, and then when needed a bishop and high council were added, making it an “operational stake.” As need arose, more bishops

⁶⁹ *History of the Church*, 3:347.

⁷⁰ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 356.

⁷¹ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 93.

were added and an Elder's quorum and an Aaronic priesthood quorum completed the stake's organization.⁷²

Bishops. Until 1839, there were only two bishops in the entire church: Edward Partridge and Newel K. Whitney. They were both bishops for the whole church, though each had regional responsibilities (Whitney over Ohio and the East with Partridge in Missouri and the West). When Whitney was called in 1831, "he did not know at the time nor Joseph either what the position of a bishop was."⁷³ In the Nauvoo period, the office of bishop was extended to more men and the role was defined more clearly.

At the creation of the Zarahemla and Nauvoo stakes, two new bishops were called: Alanson Ripley as the bishop for the Zarahemla Stake in Iowa, and Vinson Knight in the Lower Ward of Nauvoo. Partridge and Whitney continued to serve as bishops in the Upper and Middle Nauvoo Wards, respectively.⁷⁴ As historian Dale Beecher pointed out, all three Nauvoo bishops "functioned as general bishops in addition to their ward responsibilities, but after that point, all but the Presiding Bishop of the church were set apart to serve in specific geographical areas."⁷⁵ George Miller

⁷² Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 362.

⁷³ Edward Hunter as cited in Dale Beecher, "The Office of Bishop," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15:4 (Winter 1982): 103.

⁷⁴ *History of the Church*, 4:12.

⁷⁵ Beecher, "Bishop", 104.

took Edward Partridge's place as a general bishop in 1841,⁷⁶ following Partridge's death in 1840.

In August of 1842, when Nauvoo was split into ten wards, these men were called as bishops: Israel Calkins, David Evans, Jacob Foutz, Jonathan H. Hale, Isaac Higbee, Tarlton Lewis, George Miller, John Murdock, Hezekiah Peck, Newel K. Whitney. In 1845, Brigham Young appointed John M. Bernhisel as a "Traveling Bishop to visit the churches."⁷⁷ The main duty of the traveling bishops was to assist the presiding bishops in the collection of tithes.⁷⁸

Roles of Bishops in Nauvoo. The role of bishops as laid out in revelation basically consisted of four areas: "presidency of the Aaronic priesthood, stewardship over the temporal affairs of the Church; pastoral care of his members; and judicial authority over those same members."⁷⁹ Each of these categories was understood and emphasized differently as the church grew.

As presidency of the Aaronic priesthood, the bishops oversaw the organization of the Aaronic priesthood quorums. This is documented in the *History of the Church*:

⁷⁶ "And again, verily I say unto you, my servant George Miller is without guile; he may be trusted because of the integrity of his heart; and for the love which he has to my testimony I, the Lord, love him.

I therefore say unto you, I seal upon his head the office of a bishopric, like unto my servant Edward Partridge, that he may receive the consecrations of mine house, that he may administer blessings upon the heads of the poor of my people, saith the Lord. Let no man despise my servant George, for he shall honor me" (D&C 124:20-21).

⁷⁷ *History of the Church*, 7:374.

⁷⁸ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 356.

⁷⁹ Beecher, "Bishop", 103.

“The Lesser Priesthood was organized in the City of Nauvoo, March 21, 1841, by Bishops Whitney, Miller, Higbee⁸⁰, and Knight. Samuel Rolf was chosen president of the Priests’ quorum, and Stephen Markham and Hezekiah Peck, his counselors.⁸¹ Elisha Everett was chosen president of Teachers, and James W. Huntsman and James Hendricks, counselors. Phinehas R. Bird was chosen president of Deacons, and David Wood and William W. Lane counselors.”⁸² It is important to realize that at this time, Aaronic priesthood was not associated only with boys and young men⁸³; these were adults. This fact made active leadership from the bishop in the quorums less of a necessity and therefore less of a reality. Also, Aaronic priesthood quorums were associated with stakes or branches, not wards at this time. Hence all of the Nauvoo bishops came together to form stake-wide quorums.

⁸⁰ Bishop Isaac Higbee was appointed bishop of the fourth ward in Nauvoo at the time of the division from three to four wards, February 19, 1841. Joseph Smith Papers, accessed May 4, 2013, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/resources/images/library/chart10.pdf>.

⁸¹ In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today, the ward Bishop is also the president of the priests quorum.

⁸² Smith, *History of the Church*, 312.

⁸³ It was extremely rare for a young man to be ordained to the priesthood at this time. A few exceptions were William F. Cahoon, who was ordained a priest at 17, Don Carlos Smith who was ordained to an unspecified office at 14, Erastus Snow who was ordained a teacher at fifteen, and James Snow, who was ordained a teacher at 17. Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 41. (For more complete discussion, see “From Men to Boys” in Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 37-86.)

In Nauvoo and before, the primary function of the bishop was the oversight of temporal, economic concerns.⁸⁴ Though the law of consecration was and is still an important tenet of Mormonism, the practical application was different in Nauvoo than it had been in Missouri. While Saints were not deeding all of their property to the church to have their stewardships deeded back to them through the bishops, there were still many temporal matters that kept the bishops occupied: caring for the poor, collecting tithing, soliciting funds and labor for the temple, among others.⁸⁵

Nauvoo bishops mostly accomplished the role of pastoral care in meeting temporal needs of the poor, but certainly they also did some caring for and reaching out on a spiritual level. Bishop John S. Higbee arranged for prayer meetings for his ward and instructed them (as noted previously in this chapter). It is likely that most of the day-to-day ministering of the bishops has simply not been documented.

Judiciary responsibilities were clearly in effect for bishops in Nauvoo. On May 25, 1842, Joseph “spent the day in counseling the Bishops, and assisting them to expose iniquity.”⁸⁶ Bishops “carried a major responsibility for dealing with ward members in cases of wrongdoing.”⁸⁷

Joseph Smith was the most important leader in the Latter-day Saints’ worship experience during the Nauvoo period. His organization of and working with the stake

⁸⁴ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 368.

⁸⁵ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 367.

⁸⁶ *History of the Church*, 5:18-19.

⁸⁷ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 117.

presidency, high council and bishops made his influence even more widely felt.

Though bishops then did not fill as obvious of a pastoral role as modern bishops do, the extending of the office to more men and having them associated with a ward put in place critical underpinnings for local leadership for a future expanded Church.

Meetings

The sporadic meetings prior to the regrouping at Nauvoo resolved into a familiar pattern. It was roughly as follows: two Sabbath meetings when weather was good, one Sabbath meeting when weather was a little colder, and individual family, quorum or other small group meetings indoors when the weather was poor. The community-wide gatherings were dictated by weather because they were held outside. The first Thursday of the month continued to be fast day, with an early afternoon fast meeting. Later in Nauvoo prayer meetings became more important and were often held on Sunday evenings in smaller indoor settings.

In ideal weather conditions, the morning meeting usually was held at 10:00 a.m.⁸⁸ with the afternoon meeting often around 2:00 or 2:30 p.m..⁸⁹ When the weather was nice enough to meet once -- but not twice -- on a Sunday, the meeting was held at 11:00 a.m.⁹⁰ Sometimes planned meetings turned out colder than expected, effecting the attendance and length. Joseph indicated on October 13, 1839, "I attended meeting in the grove. The

⁸⁸ *History of the Church*, 5:354, 360, 423.

⁸⁹ *History of the Church*, 5:427.

⁹⁰ *History of the Church*, 6:56.

assembly was small on account of the cold weather."⁹¹ The practice of two Sunday meetings appears to have been modified by 1844, when even in good weather there was only one morning community meeting, and the second meeting for the Sabbath was done in smaller groups as the aforementioned prayer meetings.

Administration of the sacrament was still not defined by clear pattern in the Nauvoo era. Rather than a church practice or policy, the issue was left up to the individual branches, stakes or conferences. The Iowa conference resolved to "partake of the sacrament every second Sabbath."⁹² In some branches in Britain at this time, saints met together to partake of the sacrament weekly.⁹³ Administration of the sacrament in Nauvoo proves a little more of a challenge to figure out. The official history records many Sabbath meetings. Sometimes the sacrament is mentioned, and sometimes it is not. For example, on Sunday, July 28, 1839, "meeting was held as usual"⁹⁴ but with no mention of sacrament, and then one week later, "The Church came together for prayer meeting and Sacrament."⁹⁵ Whether this means that the sacrament was not necessarily a "usual" part of the Sabbath meetings, or that it was so common that its mention did not seem necessary is not immediately clear. However often it was administered, the

⁹¹ *History of the Church*, 4:15.

⁹² Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 346.

⁹³ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 346.

⁹⁴ *History of the Church*, 4:4.

⁹⁵ *History of the Church*, 4:5.

sacrament was more common in the afternoon or evening meetings.⁹⁶ A typical two-meeting Sabbath with sacrament in the latter one was recorded in the History of the Church, “Elder Eli P. Maginn preached in the forepart of the day, to the edification of the Saints. The sacrament was administered in the afternoon.”⁹⁷ When prayer meetings became the normal Sabbath afternoon meeting, sacrament administration was shifted to those prayer meetings. The smaller meetings seem better suited for the ordinance. An example of this was Sunday, November 19, 1843, where “in the evening” there was “prayer meeting and breaking of bread, &c.”⁹⁸

Church meetings played an important role in preserving the saints’ identity in their most recent settlement of Zion. The people were eager to hear from the prophet Joseph, and he was interested in shaping the meetings of his people into the kind he expected from the covenant people. On at least one occasion he told the saints that their meetings were not as dignified as they needed to be for those called and chosen of God.⁹⁹ His remarks in a September 17, 1843 meeting were about order in their meetings, “men among women, and women among men, horses in the assembly, and men and boys on the stand who did not belong there, &c.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ *History of the Church*, 5:419.

⁹⁷ *History of the Church*, 5:435.

⁹⁸ *History of the Church*, 6:79.

⁹⁹ *History of the Church*, 3:296.

¹⁰⁰ *History of the Church*, 6:34.

The topics of the meetings varied widely, though Joseph spoke often on biblical subjects.¹⁰¹ He also took opportunities to boldly testify of the restoration of the gospel, such as on June 30, 1839, when he preached to "a crowded audience," testifying of the truth of the work and the Book of Mormon.¹⁰² Joseph was not afraid to pour on the fire and brimstone either. In one meeting he "pronounced a curse upon all adulterers, and fornicators, and unvirtuous persons, and those who have made use of [his] name to carry on their iniquitous designs."¹⁰³ Though not the only frequent speaker in the big public meetings in Nauvoo, Joseph was certainly the most anticipated. Charlotte Haven, who lived in Nauvoo but was not baptized, wrote, "we had not proceeded far when a large horse-sled... stopped before us...[we] were borne along with the multitude that were thronging to hear their beloved leader. Such hurrying! One would have thought it was the last opportunity to hear him they would ever have, although we were two hours before the services were to commence."¹⁰⁴

Conferences continued to be important meetings in Nauvoo since it was the church headquarters. As such, Nauvoo's stake conferences were functionally general conferences.¹⁰⁵ These multiday meetings included the conducting of important business as well as preaching.

¹⁰¹ *History of the Church*, 5:22, 57.

¹⁰² *History of the Church*, 3:382.

¹⁰³ *History of the Church*, 4:587.

¹⁰⁴ Charlotte Haven as quoted in Holzapfel and Cottle, *Old Mormon Nauvoo*, 59.

¹⁰⁵ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 363.

Prayer meetings provided more intimate settings with very flexible hours and agendas, and sometimes meetings lasted late into the night or even into the morning hours.¹⁰⁶ After temple endowments were administered but before the temple was completed, there were even endowments at Joseph Smith's prayer meeting, such as on December 2, 1843.¹⁰⁷

Holzapful and Cottle point out even more types of meetings during this period: "Other special meetings held in Nauvoo were the family blessing meetings. These often consisted of adopted family members and blood relatives. Journals and diaries indicate that the father of the family would generally speak and conclude with a father's blessing over his family. Hot bread and sweet wine were served at these meetings."¹⁰⁸ Church meetings in Nauvoo were similar in many ways to earlier patterns already established, and like meetings from earlier periods were vital in maintaining faith and identity. From enormous city-wide gatherings on Sunday mornings to hear from the Prophet, to smaller prayer meeting groups in the evenings, religious meetings were central to Nauvoo's identity as a center place for God's Kingdom.

Locations

Early in their refuge from Missouri as the Saints were spread out in Illinois, a temporary headquarters emerged in Quincy. Wandle Mace had rented a house on the

¹⁰⁶ *History of the Church*, 7:414.

¹⁰⁷ *History of the Church*, 6:98.

¹⁰⁸ Holzapful and Cottle, *Old Mormon Nauvoo*, 48.

outskirts of Quincy that “was used as a committee house and also for religious meetings, the upper room being used for these purposes. Many of the Saints were glad to find shelter in my house from the storms, until they could find a place to live in,” Mace reported. “Very many nights the floors, upstairs and down, were covered with beds so closely it was impossible to set a foot anywhere without stepping upon someone's bed.”¹⁰⁹

The lack of adequate church-owned meeting places in the early Illinois period is underscored by the location of the May 1839 general conference. It was held “at the Presbyterian camp ground, near Quincy, Illinois.”¹¹⁰ With the shift to Commerce/Nauvoo, meeting places consisted of outdoor areas and individual homes. Indeed, Nauvoo itself would not have an official meeting house intended for all members until the temple was built.¹¹¹ The buildings early on in Nauvoo were crude, consisting of mud huts and log cabins. Gradually the buildings and conditions in the city got better, but meanwhile, church leaders tried to temper expectations of eager-to-immigrate European saints by describing what it was really like, not wanting them to be disillusioned by the undeveloped state the city they were flocking to. The *Millennial Star* noted in August 1842, “The buildings are mostly temporary cabins, built of wood

¹⁰⁹ Wandle Mace, *Autobiography*, 27.

¹¹⁰ *History of the Church*, 344.

¹¹¹ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 204.

and are very small, unfinished, and inconvenient.”¹¹² Theodore Turley built the first house raised by the Saints at Commerce.¹¹³ Many more followed, being built as quickly as the Saints were able. Joseph Smith’s log home in Nauvoo, which was purchased as part of the 1839 acquisition, was another important early building.¹¹⁴

By June of 1840 church leaders at the time estimated there were 250 houses already built and many more being constructed.¹¹⁵ However, they could not keep up with the need for buildings to meet and worship in. In a report of the First Presidency, Joseph Smith described the problem facing the Saints in April of 1841, saying, “In consequence of the impoverished condition of the Saints, the buildings which are in course of erection do not progress as fast as could be desired; but from the interest which is generally manifested by the Saints at large, we hope to accomplish much by a combination of effort, and a concentration of action, and erect the Temple and other public buildings, which we so much need for our mutual instruction and the education of our children.”¹¹⁶ Early homes, like the Smith Homestead served as places of instruction.¹¹⁷ As homes were completed, more were utilized throughout the Nauvoo

¹¹² Editorial, "Government and Institutions of Nauvoo," Volume 3, No. 4 *Millennial Star* (August 4, 1842), 69.

¹¹³ *History of the Church*, 3:375.

¹¹⁴ *History of the Church*, 4:11

¹¹⁵ *History of the Church*, 4:133.

¹¹⁶ *History of the Church*, 4:338.

¹¹⁷ "I preached at my own house morning and evening, illustrating the nature of Sin, and shewing that it is not right to sin that grace may abound." Manuscript History of the Church, January 16, 1842.

period as meeting places, as illustrated by the events of Sunday, February 4, 1844, when Brigham Young ran one meeting in the north part of Nauvoo at Brother Chamberlain's, while Wilford Woodruff oversaw one east of the city at Thomas Kingston's.¹¹⁸

A building with great significance, especially to the administration of the Church in Nauvoo was Joseph Smith's Red Brick Store. He wrote of Saturday, August 20, 1842, "Spent the day in my general business office, otherwise called the Lodge, or Assembly Room, or Council Chamber, which is over my store, and the place where most of the business of the Church is transacted."¹¹⁹ If the center of the meetings was the grove or stand, the center of administrations seems to be this room.

One of the most important meetings held in the Red Brick Store was the formation of the church's female organization, the Relief Society. The Relief Society was formed here in the "Nauvoo Lodge Room March 17th, 1842".¹²⁰ The organization met and was instructed by Relief Society and other church leaders.¹²¹ The Relief Society was interested in spiritual welfare, but also very much geared towards taking care of temporal needs. Because of this, they worked closely with bishops to coordinate efforts. The society grew so large that they started to meet with the relief society presidency by

¹¹⁸ *History of the Church*, 6:196.

¹¹⁹ *History of the Church*, 5:119.

¹²⁰ Nauvoo Female Relief Society Minutes, Church History Library.

¹²¹ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 224.

ward, thus becoming the first church organization that was closely tied to ward boundaries and bishops.¹²²

Outdoor Nauvoo Venues. Outdoor meeting places were the staple again in this stage of the Mormon experience. While advantageous in many ways, outdoor meetings were subject to weather and took a toll on the speakers. Joseph remarked, "I do not know when I shall have the privilege of speaking in a house large enough to convene the people. I find my lungs are failing with continual preaching in the open air to large assemblies."¹²³ The three most important outdoor meeting sites were the East and West Groves and the temple site. West Grove was called "the stand."¹²⁴ It was in a narrow valley directly west of the temple site. The saints constructed a platform for speaking (the stand) and brought in benches for members of the congregation. When a full Sunday crowd attended, only a low percentage of the attendees would have a seat on a bench. Even after the construction of the Nauvoo temple, the West Grove was used often for Sunday meetings because of its capacity.

The East Grove was later called the "old Public Green."¹²⁵ Joseph Smith preached his last Sunday sermon here before his martyrdom in June of 1844.¹²⁶ It is not always

¹²² Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 224.

¹²³ *History of the Church*, 5:401

¹²⁴ Holzapfel and Cottle, *Old Mormon Nauvoo*, 59.

¹²⁵ Holzapfel and Cottle, *Old Mormon Nauvoo*, 47.

¹²⁶ Holzapfel and Cottle, *Old Mormon Nauvoo*, 47.

clear in the records which grove is referred to. Perhaps it is as simple as “the stand”¹²⁷ referred to the West Grove, and “the grove”¹²⁸ meant East Grove.

The temple site was deeply important for the saints. It represented the quest to yet again build Zion, and they were eager to utilize the area sacred to them. Sunday meetings were occasionally held here.¹²⁹ Joseph Smith communicated the importance to get going on the temple in August 1840 and a groundbreaking followed shortly afterwards.¹³⁰ On October 30, 1842, the first public Sunday meeting held at the temple was an open air meeting on a temporary plank floor of what was completed on the temple.¹³¹ That meeting on the temporary floor of the temple was "well filled."¹³² Though the temporary floor was thought to be a long term replacement of the stand as a meeting place, the inside of the rising temple was turned into a shop to facilitate the building of the temple, eliminating that area as a meeting place during construction.¹³³

After the construction of the temple, it became clear that there was not enough seating space for Sunday meetings, so Brigham Young planned a large tent tabernacle made of canvas to be erected just west of the temple entrance. It was to have seated

¹²⁷ *History of the Church*, 5:9.

¹²⁸ *History of the Church*, 5:6.

¹²⁹ Hartley, *Fellow Servants*, 366, *History of the Church* 6:183

¹³⁰ *History of the Church*, 4:186.

¹³¹ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 251.

¹³² *History of the Church*, 5:182.

¹³³ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 252.

about ten thousand people. By the time the canvas was procured, the saints were already being driven from the state, so it was taken west with the Saints.¹³⁴

Temple. The Nauvoo Temple was not used as the meeting hub for long despite how it was originally envisioned. During the years of construction, Joseph Smith received more revelations regarding the ordinances that would be inseparably tied with the temple. The temple construction was pushed more to accommodate these ordinances: the basement was finished first to accommodate baptism for the dead, and then the attic was finished for the administration of endowments, and finally, when the more temple-specific functions had been catered to, the main and second floors¹³⁵ were completed for regular Sunday meetings. However, the completed or nearly completed temple was used as originally intended for a short time. The October conference in 1845 was the first public meeting held in the mostly completed temple. The History of the Church records, “Through the indefatigable exertions, unceasing industry, and heaven blessed labor, in the midst of trials, tribulations, poverty, and worldly obstacles, solemnized in some instances, by death, about five thousand saints had the inexpressible joy and great gratification to meet for the first time in the House of the Lord in the City of Joseph. From the mites and tithing millions had risen up to the glory

¹³⁴ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 479-480.

¹³⁵ There are not as many meeting recorded on the second floor. The floor was not even laid until January 1846. (“January,” *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 6, January 20, 1846, 1095.) One is a meeting of endowed members on Saturday, January 24, 1846, “for the purpose of arranging the business affairs of the church prior to our exit from this place.” *History of the Church* 7:573.

of God, as a Temple, where the children of the last kingdom could come together and praise the Lord.”¹³⁶

This first big public meeting on October 5, 1845 at the Nauvoo temple should have been the initiation of years of Sabbath services, but was unfortunately not the case. The temple was used on most Sundays for about a year until the remaining Saints were forcibly removed in September of 1846. There were interruptions due to construction, such as November 9, 1845, when it was cancelled because “the floor of the first story in the Temple [was] taken up to put in new timbers, the sleepers which were put in at the commencement of the Temple having become rotten.”¹³⁷ However, if its usage were measured by money and effort to build per Sunday meeting held, it would likely be the most expensive meetinghouse ever built by the church.

The temple was used frantically by the saints for the brief time they had in the city before evacuating, both as a meeting place for normal worship services, and especially as a place to receive the endowment ordinance. The Sunday meetings were smaller because the floor was insufficient to support a larger congregation. One event that even made the national press¹³⁸ is recorded in the Journal History of the Church on February 22, 1846. “Pres. Brigham Young attended meeting at the Temple; the room was crowded and a great weight caused the new truss floor to settle nearly to its proper

¹³⁶ *History of the Church*, 7:456.

¹³⁷ Young, *History of the Church*, 7:519. This floor was never meant to be the permanent floor.

¹³⁸ *Niles Weekly Register*, March 21, 1846, 36.

position; while settling, and inch board or some light timber underneath was caught and cracked, the sound of which created great alarm in the congregation and some jumped out of the windows, smashing the glass and all before them.... Pres. Brigham Young attempted to call the assembly to order and to explain the cause of the settling of the floor but failing to get their attention, he adjourned the meeting to the grove."¹³⁹ Later meetings were mostly very small in the attic floor or a little larger on the second floor. The sacrament was administered at most of the Sunday meetings in the temple.¹⁴⁰ Though the saints left before the temple could really be widely used for its original perceived purpose, the temple ordinances received there gave strength to the departing saints who would go on to Utah to build many meeting houses and indeed more temples.¹⁴¹

*Other Important Buildings for Meeting in Nauvoo.*¹⁴² Another important Nauvoo building for church meetings was the Seventies Hall, which was finished in July 1844. The large, two-story building was utilized for meetings of the Seventies quorums¹⁴³, the

¹³⁹ Journal History, February 22, 1846.

¹⁴⁰ *History of the Church*, 7:555-556, 578.

¹⁴¹ The Nauvoo Temple, after failing to sell, was leased on a 15 year lease to the Home Missionary Society of New York for 15 years. (Journal History of the Church, October 2, 1848) but was burned by arsonists on October 9, 1848.

¹⁴² While no buildings for specific branches or wards were constructed in Nauvoo, the nearby branch of Ramus did build a branch meetinghouse. Holzapfel and Cottle, *Old Mormon Nauvoo*, 194.

¹⁴³ *History of the Church*, 7:327.

Seventies “and their families”¹⁴⁴, and the High Priest quorum.¹⁴⁵ The Seventies Hall was in one sense a missionary training center, with the different seventies quorums providing opportunities to teach and be taught, and to get used to public speaking.¹⁴⁶

A Music Hall (or Concert Hall) was also planned and built in the latter years of Nauvoo.¹⁴⁷ It was occasionally used for Sunday meetings,¹⁴⁸ though its main function was of course concerts and other cultural events.¹⁴⁹ It was in use for the Saints for less than a year before they were on their way to yet another gathering place.¹⁵⁰ Even before the completion of the Music Hall, the Masonic Hall, dedicated in April 1844, was used

¹⁴⁴ *History of the Church*, 7:379.

¹⁴⁵ High priests apparently also met occasionally in the Masonic Hall. *History of the Church*, 7:364. They discussed building a High Priest hall, but this never came to fruition.

¹⁴⁶ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 500.

¹⁴⁷ “It is not well known that Nauvoo had a music hall, located one block from the temple, that featured frequent concerts.” Editor, “Nauvoo Symposium Held at Brigham Young University,” *Ensign*, November, 1989, 111. (See also “Chapters from the History of the Church,” *Millennial Star* Vol. 34 No. 18 April 30, 1872, 277.)

¹⁴⁸ *History of the Church*, 7:379, 532.

¹⁴⁹ Journal History of the Church records this physical description of the Music Hall on January 24, 1845, “The plasterers finished plastering the Concert Hall in Nauvoo. This building was thirty feet by fifty and eleven feet high. The ceiling was arched and had sounding jars. It had been built amidst difficulty and discouragement in consequence of poverty, and had cost nearly one thousand dollars.”

¹⁵⁰ Michael Hicks, *Mormonism and Music: A History* (University of Illinois Press, Champaign: 1989), 43-44.

for a lot of cultural activities, plays, and concerts.¹⁵¹ Some religious meetings such as funerals were also held in the Masonic Hall.¹⁵²

Conclusion

The Saints in Nauvoo were the beneficiaries of further advancement of congregational organization and worship. It was here that wards were first established with bishops set to administer temporal needs in them. Priesthood quorums became important sources of fellowship and instruction. The Relief Society was established, giving women an outlet for companionship, teaching and service. Community-wide Sunday meetings where Joseph Smith and other leaders taught, along with smaller, more intimate prayer meetings on Sunday evenings strengthened faith. Beautiful buildings like the Seventies Hall, the Masonic Hall, and particularly the Temple provided space for gathering and worship.

Nauvoo, the city beautiful, came to represent the very best and the very worst of the Mormon experience so far. From a swamp to a thriving city, the saints built their new Zion city up to a place that converts flocked to by the thousand. In this city, their Prophet revealed doctrine and ordinances, encouraged the building of a temple to fully express them, and taught regularly and powerfully in large public meetings. But his martyrdom and yet another expulsion marred the happy legacy of the City of Joseph.

¹⁵¹ James B Allen, "Nauvoo's Masonic Hall," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 10 (1990): 47-48.

¹⁵² "Masonic Hall, Nauvoo, Illinois," accessed June 3, 2013, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/place/masonic-hall-nauvoo-illinois>.

However, advancements and strength that came through yet another experiment at building Zion would fortify the saints to move west and do what they had done so many times before: begin again.

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

It would have been an amazing contrast for a person who attended the April 6, 1830, organization meeting to see a typical Sunday in Nauvoo, with the thronging crowds gathering to the grove east of the Nauvoo temple to hear Joseph Smith or Brigham Young speak. The thousands that showed up for the morning meeting might attend a smaller prayer meeting with the administration of the Sacrament in the afternoon. Who of the small group in 1830 would have guessed that by 1846 there would be over 30,000 members of the Church worldwide? In like manner, who of the booming Nauvoo-based Church would have imagined a typical Sunday in Salt Lake Valley? What would they have thought of a short drive to see the five temples within 25 miles of Salt Lake City? Or the hundreds of Church buildings they would pass on the way? What if they stepped into one of the buildings and observed a bishop with his counselors presiding at a sacrament meeting to a large ward seated in padded benches? What would they think of the ward council meeting with the bishopric, surrounded by Relief Society, Elders Quorum, Primary presidents and other ward leaders? And what if they were told that there would be nearly an entire ward or branch in 2013 for each individual member in 1846?

Much of the individual faith and community strength that helped shape the Church of six in 1830 to a Church of nearly fifteen million in 2013 has come from the advancement of congregational worship. The advancements were due to changing circumstances as well as divine instruction and affected all elements of congregational worship: organization of branches, wards, and stakes; meeting patterns; leadership of the local groups; and places where they met.

Congregations

Early congregations in the Mormon movement were composed of a few families or scattered believers that lived nearby, mostly in New York and Pennsylvania. One of the groups formed in 1830, the Colesville Branch, was not only among the first branches to be organized, but stayed together as a cohesive group through multiple moves and trials. The Colesville members were a microcosm of the significance of meaningful local interactions in the Mormon experience. Many of the smaller, very early groups heeded the call of a prophet in 1831 to gather in Ohio. There were eventually 38 branches in Ohio, with only one per community, including the headquarters of the Church in Kirtland. In this configuration, multiple branches occasionally met together in conferences, vaguely resembling the future ward and stake arrangement.

Meanwhile in the other Church headquarters of the 1830s, Missouri, an even more striking precedent to modern ward organization was put in place. In Jackson County, larger settlements were split along geographical lines and by population, rather

than just one group per community. Eventually ten branches were organized. After the Saints' expulsion into Clay County in 1833, some branches were formed, while other groups met together informally. After the move into northern Missouri from 1836-1839, there was little progress in how congregations were created—in fact, there was no comparable splitting of the communities into multiple branches as had been done in Jackson County earlier, though additional stakes were established. Stakes in these decades were mostly large branches, rather than the umbrella organization of a collection of smaller congregations like today. The exceptions would be Nauvoo, where the city was split up into wards (though not ecclesiastical ones) and the neighboring Zarahemla stake in Iowa.

Nauvoo was the largest and most prosperous Church center yet. In one sense it was the largest congregation, but in another it was the birthplace of the ward. The Nauvoo ward did not function as modern wards do, but their creation was a key movement towards the organization enjoyed by the Church today. Other significant groups that met the need for fellowship and instruction on a scale smaller than the thousands-strong crowds that many Nauvoo Sunday services provided were priesthood quorums and Relief Society. These groups provided men and women respectively camaraderie and opportunities to serve and grow. Priesthood quorums existed before but were magnified and utilized much more in the Nauvoo period. The Relief Society was also first formed in Nauvoo.

Meetings

Early meetings in New York were neighborhood missionary meetings. Often baptisms followed. There was no clear pattern for administration of the Sacrament in early years, but it was administered frequently, including at confirmation meetings and conferences.

Church meetings in Kirtland began to take on a clear pattern: one morning and one afternoon Sabbath service. Sermons were generally extemporaneous, with most church members seeing them as inspired and inspiring while a few (many of which either became disaffected or were outsiders looking for faults) viewing them as rambling and confused. The Sacrament ordinance was administered often. Other gatherings could be held any day of the week and were also important, including the Thursday fast meeting and confirmation meetings. The regular pattern of Sunday services and other times of instruction, like conferences, were made possible by faithful believers gathering. The meetings during the Kirtland period helped strengthen those who chose to relocate.

Large public meetings were cancelled for a time in 1833 in Clay County due to concern over more jealousy and persecution. In this context smaller prayer meetings, which had started in Jackson County, became increasingly important. These were generally mid-week, less formal meetings of the Saints. Even after the instruction to resume the larger meetings, some were still wary to congregate, but most pressed on in

faith. In Northern Missouri meetings continued much as usual, though there was a cessation at the end when persecutions once again were particularly intense.

The subject matter of the sermons in the early decades of the Church varied widely, and most were still unassigned and unplanned. The desire to speak by the spirit or “with Liberty” was helpful when done appropriately to audiences with ears to hear, but could also be potentially confusing or even damaging. Sidney Rigdon’s sermons in northern Missouri showed how impactful meetings and their content could be, as in the cases of his Salt Sermon and his 4th of July Sermon.

Church gatherings in Nauvoo boasted the frequent instruction from beloved leaders, particularly Joseph Smith. These city-wide affairs bolstered a people who were both recovering from and preparing for persecution to the point of expulsion. As important as the large meetings were, equally critical were the smaller, more intimate ones. Prayer meetings reached all-time preeminence in the Church, to the point that there was only one large meeting on most Sundays and the second meeting was expected to be in the smaller prayer-meeting setting. Family, quorum, and other meetings added to the worship experience for the Saints in Nauvoo.

Leadership

Leadership of Mormon congregations expanded as the Church did. At the beginning in 1830, the entire Church leadership consisted of two presiding Elders. The Colesville Branch was the first group to have their own specifically chosen leader in

addition to the two Elders presiding over the whole Church. There was some confusion as to who could lead and receive revelation early on. The concept of stewardship was clarified during the second conference in September 1830. Joseph Smith was to have authority over and receive revelation for the whole church, and other leaders would be called, “in order, and by common consent in the church” (D&C 28:12).

In Ohio, more presiding elders were called over branches. The Kirtland congregation, by far the largest group, was overseen by the first functioning presidency¹--a president with counselors--in March 1832, with Joseph Smith as the president. One year later, the First Presidency was organized and assumed the leadership of Kirtland. During the early 1830s, with dual church centers eight hundred miles apart, it became clear to the prophet that local leadership would have to be expanded and relied upon. In February 1834, the Kirtland Stake was formed, with Joseph Smith and his counselors as the presidency along with a high council consisting of twelve men. In Missouri, David Whitmer was made president in a similar

¹ First called the “presidency of the high priesthood” it consisted of the presidency of the high priests quorum.

organization.² The Church in Missouri and the Kirtland Stake each had a bishop assigned to oversee temporal affairs.³

Branch presidents and bishops, while seen as almost identical in the modern Church, were very different in the 1830s and 1840s. Bishops were primarily responsible for temporal affairs of the Church. Starting with one and then eventually four general church bishops, followed by the greatly expanded and clarified role of one bishop per ward in Nauvoo, the extension of the calling as bishop to more men not only filled immediate needs, but demonstrated prophetic foresight in setting up a leadership structure that would become critical in the future expanded church. Branch presidents were over the ecclesiastical affairs of a congregation. Early on, they were presiding elders, but later were more commonly high priests. The modern bishop is really the combination of the two early roles of bishop and branch president.

Meeting Places

The physical location where groups of Saints met was an integral part of their worship experience. The first two decades brought the construction of many important Church buildings, but this time was really dominated by outdoor and in-home meetings. Some important buildings included the log meetinghouses built in Jackson

² Not initially called a stake, since Missouri was to be Zion, and the other communities were to be stakes of Zion (See D&C 82).

³ For charts visualizing the leadership structures, see Brandon S. Plewe, S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard H. Jackson, *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 2012), 39, 58.

County, the schoolhouse/printing office in Kirtland, and the Seventies Hall in Nauvoo.

The most striking and significant buildings that accommodated Mormon meetings were the Kirtland and Nauvoo temples. These buildings, which took tremendous sacrifice to construct, were not only the central meeting places when finished, but also were gathering sites even when under construction (especially in the case of the Nauvoo temple). While neither temple was used as long as originally anticipated, the fact of their construction is a testament to the Saints' desire to meet, and to meet in a dedicated, sacred place.

Some Conclusions

Stakes, wards and branches, with their meetings, leaders and buildings are fundamental to the sustaining of an enormous, worldwide modern church. The foundations for these were set in place in the first two decades of the Church. Certainly two presiding elders could not handle the administrative load of the modern Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Nor would a one-congregation-per-city configuration serve the needs of today's Church. Were the adjustments just natural and necessary as the organization grew, or was there a divine direction that started changes and put in frameworks before a mortal observer would guess it was needed?

The early Latter-day Saints as a whole had no doubt that they were divinely led. Despite the difficulties of persecution and relocation, they (for the most part) eagerly followed their prophet. As they moved from place to place in an effort to live their

faith, they kept their faith in a leader whose call was divine. The adaptations made to congregational organization, meeting patterns, leadership and worship locations not only reflect the obviously necessary changes of a growing movement, but also reveal foresight fitting a Church claiming prophets and modern revelation.

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