

# History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Puerto Rico



The history of the Church in Puerto Rico started in 1940 when sacrament meetings were held in the homes of two returned missionaries from Argentina which were Pan American Airways employees; Byron Wheeler y Donald Brown. In 1947 Garner H. Russell (who was a member of the Seventies by 1986) held regular Church meeting with his family and members of the military that served in Ramey Base in Aguadilla, then Guajataca, and by 1950 at the military chapel at Fort. Buchanan in San Juan. Melvin J. Rudd was the leader of that small group of Saints.

The year 1955 was very important. Elder Ezra Taft Benson, who was at the time the Secretary of Agriculture for the United States, visited the island as part of a Latin America tour. During the General Conference held in April of that year he stated " I was very pleased to meet our member soldiers at the Ramey Base and the soldiers at Fort. Buchanan where the first Area Conference was held." In October 1963, on a routine visit, Ned Winder, president of the Florida Mission, felt inspired to send missionaries to the island. In January 1964, Elders Vert Talbert y Dwight K. Hunter arrived in Puerto Rico to work under his direction. The visits to the little branches

of the already formed District of Puerto Rico were extended to the rest of the people of Puerto Rico.

The first chapel in Puerto Rico was built in 1968 after a Caribbean Conference presided over by the Mission President, J. Murray Rawson. On September 7 of that year the groundbreaking ceremony was held in the Jardines de Caparra neighborhood. Dr. Carlos Lastra, Dean of Administration of the University of Puerto Rico, was the honored guest for the event.

The Puerto Rico San Juan Mission was created in 1979 with a membership of 1,892. The first Stake was organized on December 14, 1980 by Elder Ezra Taft Benson, who at the time was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Herminio De Jesus was called as the Stake President. All the programs of the Church were working when President Spencer W. Kimball visited the island in March 1981. It lifted the spirits and gave joy to 12,000 members of the Church in Puerto Rico.

With continued growth in the island other stakes were organized over the years in Ponce, Mayagüez, Carolina, Toa Baja and Caguas.

For many years Church members in Puerto Rico had to travel to the US mainland and later to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic to receive temple blessings. This began to change when on Sunday, October 7th, 2018, President Russell M. Nelson announced the construction of a temple for the island. There was great emotion at that General Conference; the San Juan Temple was announced with eleven other temples, San Juan, Puerto Rico being the last. After some preparations the groundbreaking ceremony was held on May 4, 2019 in the Villa Andalucía neighborhood. Friends of the Church and over four hundred members attended the event. Others saw the event via technology from chapels across the island.

