

# WALKING IN THE SAND

A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF  
JESUS CHRIST  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS IN **GHANA**

**Studies in Latter-day Saint History Series**

An imprint of BYU Studies and the  
Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History

Brigham Young University  
Provo, Utah

# WALKING IN THE SAND

A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF  
JESUS CHRIST  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS IN **GHANA**

**Emmanuel Abu Kissi**  
edited by Matthew K. Heiss

BYU Studies  
and  
Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History  
Provo, Utah

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This history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day  
Saints in Ghana is dedicated to the memory of my son

Eric Yeboah Kissi,  
30 November 1974–22 June 1989,

who lost his life in the heat of the “Freeze” on the Church.



# Contents

Illustrations		ix
Preface		xiii
Timeline	The History of the Church in Ghana	xxv
Chapter 1	“Go Ye into All the World”	1
Chapter 2	Pioneers in Ghana	11
Chapter 3	Early Missionary Efforts	33
Chapter 4	Laborers in the Vineyard	73
Chapter 5	Building the Church in Ghana	97
Chapter 6	A Case Study of the Church in Ghana	121
Chapter 7	Farm Projects in the Ghana Accra Mission	141
Chapter 8	The Church in Koforidua and Kpong	157
Chapter 9	Persecution and Ignorance	169
Chapter 10	The “Freeze”	199
Chapter 11	The “Restoration”	237
Chapter 12	Blessings of the Temple	263
Chapter 13	The Accra Ghana Temple, the Fruit of Faith	285
Chapter 14	“Walking in the Sand”: by Matthew K. Heiss and Emmanuel A. Kissi	307

Appendixes

1. Church to Open Missionary Work in Nigeria	319
2. Examples of Documents Produced by Would-Be Latter-day Saints in Ghana before 1978	321
i. Constitution, 1969	
ii. Organizational meeting record, 16 September 1972	
iii. Letter of invitation, 3 October 1972	
iv. Soul willing crusade announcement, September 1973	
v. Invitation for members to participate in crusade, 13 August 1973	
3. Testimony of Brother E. A. Sowah	339
4. President Cunningham	343
5. Missionary Training in Ghana, 1983–88 at the Missionary Training Center (MTC) in Accra	355
6. Mission Presidents and Their Wives in Ghana, 1980–2003	357
7. A Brief History of Two Accra Branches	359
8. Church Educational System	363
Bibliography	367
Index	369



## Illustrations

Map of Ghana	xxiv
David O. McKay	3
LaMar S. Williams	4
Glen G. Fisher	5
R. A. F. Mensah and Joseph W. B. Johnson	12
Clement Osekre	14
Joseph William Billy Johnson	15
Church registration document for the Ghana Land Registry	19
Early meeting facility in Cape Coast	25
Representation of Moroni in Cape Coast meeting hall	26
Church President Spencer W. Kimball	27
Edwin Q. Cannon, Janath R. Cannon, Rachel W. Mabey, and Rendell N. Mabey	35
Meeting facility in Sofokurom, Ghana	40
LaNore and Bryan Espenschied	44

Lowell and Shirley Diamond	45
Reed and Naomi Clegg	46
Brother and Sister Akaffo	48
Priscilla Sampson-Davis	55
Group picture following a baptism on 31 August 1980	57
Emmanuel and Monica Opare and family	61
President Spencer W. Kimball with Samuel Bainson and Crosby Sampson-Davis	62
Accra Ghana District Presidency, March 1982	65
Sylvester and Elizabeth Cooper	68
Derek A. Cuthbert, Dr. Emmanuel Kissi, and several missionaries, early 1980s	74
Clark and Donna Nelson	75
Leland J. and Marie B. Housley	79
Clinton and Maxine Jensen	90
Mission growth in Ghana	98
Ernest Junior and Norma Miller	100
Cape Coast meetinghouse	109
Dr. Kissi's Deseret Hospital in Accra, Ghana	112
Fanti translation of the Book of Mormon, 1999	118
Stephen and Margaret Abu	122
Margaret and Stephen Abu and Miles H. and Stella Cunningham	127
Cape Coast welfare farm	142
Merrell and Geraldine Nelson	145
Latter-day Saint meetinghouse in Abomосу, Ghana	149
Walter and Ruth Stewart, 1987	160
Meetinghouse in Koforidua, Ghana, 1999	161

Larry B. and Joan K. Duke	166
Gilbert and Gretchen Petramalo	176
Newspaper clipping from <i>People's Daily Graphic</i>	183
Eric Kissi, 1987	194
Spencer H. Osborn, Jack H. Goaslind, and Alexander B. Morrison	206
Grant and Alice Gunnell	248
Emmanuel F. Sackey, Emmanuel O. Opare, and Bossman Dowuona-Hammond	257
Elder Boyd K. Packer	257
Elder James E. Faust	258
Relief Society General President Elaine L. Jack with Ghanaian sisters	259
Dr. Kissi with Daniel Graham, Tyson Neumann, and Tad Raban	264
President Gordon B. Hinckley	269
Elder Emmanuel O. Opare	274
President Gordon B. Hinckley and Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, 1998	275
Elder Russell M. Nelson and others at Accra Ghana Temple groundbreaking, 16 November 2001	277
Accra Ghana Temple, January 2004	286
Elder Russell M. Nelson with local Saints at the Accra Ghana Temple groundbreaking	295
Elder Sheldon F. Child and Ghana President John A. Kufuor, 2004	296
Africans at the Accra Ghana Temple open house, 2003	297
Elder Emmanuel A. Kissi	307
Abu Kissi	309

Emmanuel Kissi family, 1998	310
Missionary training groups in Ghana	355
List of mission presidents and their wives	357

## Preface

*History needs to come from the grassroots,  
from where the people live.*

—Leonard Arrington<sup>1</sup>

On 27 November 1832, the Lord taught Joseph Smith what to record for Church history. He said it was the “duty of the Lord’s clerk . . . to keep a history, and a general church record of all things that transpire in Zion” and also the Latter-day Saints’ “manner of life, their faith, and works” (D&C 85:1–2). A year earlier, Joseph Smith had been told by revelation that a history was to be kept that would “be for the good of the church, and for the rising generations that shall grow up on the land of Zion” (D&C 69:8).

Over one hundred and fifty years later, in his keynote address at the inaugural conference of the Mormon Pacific Historical Society, Church Historian Leonard Arrington said, “As the Church becomes more international, it will become increasingly important to write the history of the Latter-day

Saints in their homelands. By reconstructing these people's lives, we give their heirs a sense of their LDS heritage as well as provide real models for their own lives, models with whom they can identify.”<sup>2</sup>

By the year 2000, with over 100,000 Latter-day Saints living on the African continent, the time was right for a local history to be written by an African Latter-day Saint. This book, *Walking in the Sand*, is the first “grassroots” history written from West Africa. Its unique contribution is that it was written from a Ghanaian perspective by a man who not only witnessed most of the events he describes in the book but also participated in them. “Walking in the sand” is a Ghanaian expression that means “alive and well”: the Church in Ghana is thriving.

### **The Author**

The author, Emmanuel Abu Kissi, was born in Abomosu, Ghana, in 1938. He married Benedicta Elizabeth Bamfo on 10 June 1970. They are the parents of seven children. After graduating from medical school in Ghana, he traveled to England, where he pursued advanced medical training. While Dr. Kissi was in Macclesfield, near Manchester, England, Latter-day Saint missionaries came to the Kissi home and taught them the gospel. Emmanuel and his wife joined the Church in February 1979, eight months after the revelation on the priesthood had been announced. Shortly after their baptisms, the Kissis moved back to Ghana, where they have been instrumental in Church leadership and in helping the Church to become firmly established in their country.

Dr. Kissi, one of the earliest Ghanaian converts to the Church, quickly became a priesthood leader. While in England, he had the benefit of observing and participating in the full Church program. He returned to Ghana shortly after the arrival there of the first Latter-day Saint missionaries. He has held significant leadership positions: as one of Ghana's first branch presidents, as a district president, as a counselor to three mission presidents, and as a patriarch. In April 2002 General Conference, he was sustained as an Area Authority Seventy. When the Church was banned from Ghana and the expatriate missionaries were deported in June 1989, Elder Kissi was asked to serve as acting mission president. He was also the leader of the group that traveled to Salt Lake City to record the temple ceremonies in two Ghanaian languages.

I first met Dr. Kissi in September 1998. Before then I had known of him for many years, having read about the establishment of the Church in West Africa and having recorded many interviews with mission presidents, missionaries, and others who had served in Ghana. In many ways, Elder Kissi had become a larger-than-life figure in my mind. Now that we have met and worked together on this project, I can say that he has fulfilled many of my great expectations.

### **How This History Came About**

During my 1998 visit to Ghana, I was recording oral histories with local Latter-day Saints for the Church Archives. Though he had been interviewed by others in the past, I sought the opportunity to record an oral history with Dr. Kissi. During that interview, he told me about his brother, Stephen Abu, who had experienced persecution in the Kissis'

hometown of Abomosu. Upon his release as district president, Abu had given a talk at a district conference in which he detailed Church history in the Abomosu area. I expressed an interest in acquiring a copy of the talk for preservation in the Church Archives, explaining to Dr. Kissi the Archives' mission to document the establishment and growth of the Church by collecting and preserving the personal papers of Latter-day Saints. I believe this short conversation planted a seed within Dr. Kissi. The fruit of that seed is this history.

Shortly after returning from that trip, I received word that Dr. Kissi had undertaken a history-writing project. I learned that he was busy gathering history from Church members in Ghana and that he had written to several of the early missionary couples and mission presidents asking for information. He also requested certain documents from the Church Archives that would help him in his research. I marveled that he had the time and energy to undertake such a project, given his busy work schedule and heavy Church responsibilities.

In December 2001, Dr. Kissi completed the final chapter of his manuscript. He had a copy delivered to me in Salt Lake City, Utah. I assumed this was for placement in the Church Archives. However, I soon learned that he expected the text to be published. I was a bit concerned about this because the Church Archives was not, at that time, in the publication business. However, I was soon directed to Grant R. Underwood of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at Brigham Young University, who was interested in the publication of international Church history. Thanks to Underwood, who recognized Dr. Kissi's unique contribution, arrangements were made for this work to be published.



Having gone through the text in great detail, I have two thoughts that are worth mentioning in this introduction. First, I was impressed with the power of first-person narrative. This is more than a chronicle of the important events that document the establishment of the Church in Ghana, one of the first nations in Africa to be opened for Church missionary work following the 1978 revelation on the priesthood. This is the story of a man who was a part of all the critical events documented in the text. Dr. Kissi was on the forefront as acting mission president when the expatriate missionaries were deported from Ghana in 1989. He has also been on the forefront of local leadership, missionary work, and translation of sacred texts and ordinances into Ghana's native languages. He knows whereof he writes.

The second thought has to do with gratitude. Elder Kissi is aware of the sacrifices made by the missionary couples who have served in Ghana. He is also aware of the faith of the Ghanaian Latter-day Saints, many of whom live in the adverse conditions common to developing nations. He appreciates the commitment of Latter-day Saints who endured the period of persecution known as the "Freeze," the eighteen months when the Church was banned from operating in Ghana. I believe this text was written as an act of appreciation for the faithfulness of the missionaries and Ghanaian Church members as well as for the blessings of the restored gospel. I remember being invited into the Kissi home and seeing, hanging above a doorway, a small slogan made of cross-stitch that reads, "Because I have been given much, I too must give." This saying seems to capture the essence of Elder and Sister Kissi's lives and is certainly one of the reasons this book was written.

### **The Style of Writing:**

#### **Ghana and the West Blend into a Unique Historiography**

The style of the history you are about to read is unique and deserves brief explanation. Some histories are written as seamless stories based upon careful research and completely footnoted. This history has an entirely different style. It is something like a patchwork quilt; several different narratives have been sewn together to produce a story that is, at times, diverse in voice but unified in theme. Rather than smooth transitions, the reader will notice the sometimes abrupt “seams” that connect each narrative to the next.

Elder Kissi had a story to tell, his own story based on his experiences helping the Church become established in Ghana. To fill in some gaps, he invited contributions from other writers, all of whom also had experiences in Ghana. Thus, Elder Kissi’s personal narrative mixes with others’ personal narratives and with some information from books and articles. Though I do not know much, if anything, about Ghanaian historiography, this book may be a mixture of Western scholarship and writing with traditional story telling (first-person narrative).

Another factor the reader ought to be aware of is that this history was written a long distance from the rich resources in the Church Archives. Special permission was given to Elder Kissi to have copies of a few select documents. However, Elder Kissi had to gather most of the information on his own. In many instances, he drew upon his own experiences. It is Elder Kissi’s voice and perspective that is central to this work.

The purpose of my editorial work was not to turn Elder Kissi’s manuscript into the polished text of a Western scholar

or historian. Rather, I tried to identify the narratives and writings of others while preserving Elder Kissi's voice and style of writing throughout. Where more information was needed, I added brief footnotes. The British spelling has been preserved, although some punctuation has been changed to the American standard. Elder Kissi's original text had very few footnotes. I have tried to cite all the direct quotes and obvious paraphrases in footnotes and according to *The Chicago Manual of Style*. This was not always possible. It is important to know, however, that nothing was done to change the tone of the text. If you know Elder Kissi, you will recognize his voice throughout.

Let me return to where I began: Leonard Arrington's inaugural address at the Mormon Pacific Historical Society. "As the Church grows, the saga of the locality—of the ward, the stake, the region, and the individual Latter-day Saint—takes on greater significance," Arrington said. "Traditionally, our general Church history is too abstract and too impersonal. When history comes from the grassroots, from where the people live and worship, the individual can identify personally with the general Church experience."<sup>3</sup> I hope that those who read this work will identify personally with the struggle, sacrifice, faith, and eventual triumph that is so much a part of Latter-day Saint life and history, be it in nineteenth-century Nauvoo or twentieth-century Ghana, West Africa.

### **Acknowledgments**

The original text, now in the Church Archives, was produced on a typewriter. Cherie Best, a Church-service missionary working in the Church Archives, transcribed

the text. Bonnie Curtis, another Church-service missionary working in the Church Archives, compared the computerized version with the original. Richard L. Jensen of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute read a copy of the original version and offered many suggestions that filled in gaps and made some portions clearer for those with limited knowledge of Ghana, its history, and its culture. Their work is greatly appreciated. Thanks also to Karen Todd, Heather Seferovich, Alison Gainer, and all the BYU Studies staff, who have shepherded this project to completion.

### **Request for Additional Material**

Having worked in the Church Archives for nearly two decades, and having just completed the editorial work on this history, I realize better than before the critical need to preserve historical records. No wonder that, on the day the Church was organized, the Lord gave a commandment to write, collect, and preserve the history of the Church: “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you ” (D&C 21:1).

Actually, record keeping in a gospel sense goes back to the very beginning of time on earth. Adam was taught to keep a book of remembrance (Mos. 6:5, 8, 46). Moses was commanded to write about the vision of the creation given to him by the Lord (Mos. 1:40–41). Nephi felt compelled to keep a family history, which became an important part of the Book of Mormon (1 Ne. 1:1). When Christ visited the Nephites, He asked to inspect the records. When the Savior discovered that the words of Samuel the Lamanite were not in the record, He commanded that the gaps be filled (3 Ne. 23:4–13). And finally, Mormon may be one of the greatest ancient historians who

ever lived. He compiled the history of an entire civilization spanning nearly a thousand years.

Today, the archivists/historians in the Church do their best to maintain this sacred tradition, on which the Lord elaborated in Doctrine and Covenants 69:2–8:

Hearken unto me, saith the Lord your God . . . John Whitmer . . . shall continue in writing and making a history of all the important things which he shall observe and know concerning my church. . . . And also, my servants who are abroad in the earth should send forth the accounts of their stewardships to the land of Zion. . . . Nevertheless, let my servant John Whitmer travel many times from place to place, and from church to church, that he may the more easily obtain knowledge—Preaching and expounding, writing, copying, selecting, and obtaining all things which shall be for the good of the church, and for the rising generations that shall grow up on the land of Zion.

Archivists/historians in the Church Archives are traveling, “writing, copying [microfilming], selecting, and [trying to obtain] all things which shall be for the good of the church.” Often this is a labor-intensive work to locate and contact Church members who have records of historical significance. Those of us who work in Collection Development sometimes wish there were easier ways to identify and gather such records. Computers, digital cameras, Church-service missionaries, email, and the Internet have greatly improved our ability to communicate with Church members and preserve their records, but there is always more to be done.

The archivists/historians of the Church Archives are conducting ongoing projects to document the establishment of the Church in Africa and throughout the world.

The objective of the Church Archives is to preserve the personal narratives of Latter-day Saints as well as the first-hand accounts of missionaries and others who have served throughout the world.

If you have had Church-related experiences in Africa, did you keep a journal or some other type of record? Did you write letters to your family while you were in Africa? Perhaps you have a copy of your homecoming talk or a report of what you did. If you are an African Latter-day Saint, have you written your life history? Do you keep a journal in which you record what it means to be a member of the Church where you live? These are the kinds of records we are attempting to locate and preserve in the Church Archives Africa collection.

If you have such records, please consider loaning them to the Church Archives, where we can copy or microfilm them. They will then be added to the permanent collection of records pertaining to the establishment of the Church in Africa. If you are concerned about permanent preservation, you may also donate original records to the Church.

As you consider this request, you will no doubt have questions. I would enjoy the opportunity to discuss this ongoing project with you in greater detail. Please feel free to call me, write me, or contact me by email.

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## Notes

1. Leonard Arrington, "On Writing Latter-day Saint History," in *Voyages of Faith: Explorations in Mormon Pacific History*, ed. Grant Underwood (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2000), 4.
2. Arrington, *Voyages of Faith*, 1.
3. Arrington, *Voyages of Faith*, 4.



Map of Ghana



## Timeline of the History of the Church in Ghana

The information in this timeline was taken from Ghana Accra Mission annual historical reports, 1992–1996, 2001 and files collected, all housed in Church Archives.

- Feb. 1964** Joseph William Billy Johnson received a copy of the Book of Mormon and became converted. He started organizing “Latter-day Saint” congregations in Ghana.
- Oct. 1969** J. W. B. Johnson moved from Accra to start the Cape Coast LDS group, leaving the congregation in Accra to Dr. Mensah.
- 1969** J. E. Bennet-Ampiah started an LDS group in Assin Fosu.
- 1973** J. E. Bennet-Ampiah said Dr. Mensah was in ill health and could not run a church. However, according to Johnson, in 1973 Dr. Mensah talked to the group in Assin

- Fosu about getting rid of Johnson; Mensah was not successful.
- 1973–74** Bennet-Ampiah was transferred to Swedru for work, and the LDS group in Assin Fosu faltered.
- 1976** Johnson went to Monrovia, Liberia, to find “The Mormons” but instead found the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. No further contact was established. Johnson’s Cape Coast group split. The Apostolic Divine Church of Ghana was formed by one of the splinter groups, but it lasted only a few months.
- 1977** The Church of God in Christ from the USA sent leaders who met with J. W. B. Johnson to try to dissuade him from the Latter-day Saint Church. These leaders wanted to pay Johnson to join their church in Ghana.
- 8 June 1978** The First Presidency, comprised of Spencer W. Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, and Marion G. Romney, announced to the world that the priesthood was now available to “all worthy male members of the Church.” This announcement became Official Declaration—2 of the Doctrine and Covenants on 30 September 1978.
- Nov. 1978** Rendell N. and Rachel Wilson Mabey along with Edwin Q. and Janath Cannon began missionary work in Ghana. Among the first baptized was J. W. B. Johnson.

- 10 Dec. 1978** First branch of the Church organized in Ghana. J. W. B. Johnson, branch president; James Ewudzie, first counselor; Edward Evans Ewusie, second counselor; John Hill Cobbinah, clerk.
- 5 July 1979** Priscilla Sampson-Davis, the first official member in Accra, was baptized.
- Aug. 1979** Oscar McConkie from the Church's Legal Department and Spencer Palmer of Brigham Young University were in Ghana as Church representatives to assist with formal organization of the Church.
- 1 July 1980** Africa West Mission organized. It included Nigeria and Ghana. Bryan A. Espenschied served as the first mission president. At the end of 1980, there were 498 members of the Church in Ghana.<sup>1</sup>
- 1981** Seven branches in Ghana were functioning.
- 4 June 1983** David B. Haight, Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, arrived in Ghana, dedicated Ghana, and blessed the land.
- July 1985** Ghana Accra Mission organized.
- 14 June 1989** Government expelled expatriate missionaries and shut down Church operations. This era is called the "Freeze" by Ghanaian Latter-day Saints. Emmanuel A. Kissi was called to serve as acting mission president during this time.

- Nov. 1990** The Church was allowed to operate once again. The “Freeze” was declared over by government officials.
- 21 April 1991** Two stakes were organized in Ghana: the Accra Ghana Stake and the Cape Coast Ghana Stake.
- 1992** The Ghana Accra Mission consisted of Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.
- April 1992** Missionaries were evacuated from Sierra Leone by US forces. In August, one senior missionary couple returned to Sierra Leone.
- June 1992** David M. Tarr was made district president in Liberia. Contact was difficult due to civil war there. Tarr fled to the Ivory Coast because of the war.
- 1992 July** Christopher Chukwurah became mission president. He was the first African to preside over the mission.
- 18–19 Dec. 1992** First regional single adult conference organized by Accra Ghana Stake and Ghana Accra Mission held in all West Africa. Two hundred single adults attended.
- 1992** There were four meetinghouses in Ghana owned and built by Latter-day Saints.
- 14 May 1993** Gordon B. Hinckley visited Ghana.
- 1993** Baptism total: 1,243 (791 in Ghana; 426 in Sierra Leone; 26 in Liberia, this in spite of civil war).

- Dec. 1994** Temple assistance program was offered to priesthood leaders—stake presidents, counselors to mission president, patriarchs, district presidents who had served two years or longer, and bishops who had served one year or longer. Ghanaian priesthood leaders were able to travel to Johannesburg, South Africa, to attend the temple.
- 1 Jan. 1995** First young North American elders arrived in Ghana. They were Tyson P. Neumann, Tad R. Raban, and Daniel J. Graham.
- July 1995** Elder and Sister Brooksby arrived in Ghana as family history missionaries. One year later, they had collected ten thousand names for temple work.
- May 1997** Area President James O. Mason presided at Cape Coast Ghana Stake conference. The stake was divided, and the Takoradi Ghana Stake was organized. Stephen A. Kwaw was called to serve as Cape Coast Ghana Stake president. Kenneth Andam, formerly president of Cape Coast Stake, was called as Takoradi Ghana Stake president.
- Feb. 1998** Church President Gordon B. Hinckley visited Ghana, met with Ghana's president Jerry John Rawlings, and announced that a temple would be built in Ghana.
- 16 Nov. 2001** Ground was finally broken for construction of Accra Ghana Temple; Russell M. Nelson presided.

- Apr. 2002** Emmanuel A. Kissi was called as an Area Authority Seventy in general conference.
- 11 Jan. 2004** Gordon B. Hinckley dedicated the Accra Ghana Temple. Grant Gunnell, former Ghana Accra mission president, was called as the first temple president.

### **Note**

1. Membership statistics provided by Member and Statistical Records Department, 15 April 2002.

## Chapter 1

---

### **“Go Ye into All the World”**

**O**ur Lord Jesus Christ, during His mortal ministry, sent forth His twelve disciples and commanded them, saying, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not” (Matt. 10:5). He demonstrated this injunction against non-Jews when a woman of Canaan came out pleading that the Lord should minister to her daughter “grievously vexed” with a devil. He answered the woman, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Then again He answered and said, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs” (Matt. 15:22–26).

After His resurrection, however, He said unto His disciples, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Then, in what appear to be His last words during His forty days’ ministry after His resurrection, the Lord said to His disciples, “and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). We read

in the Acts of the Apostles that his disciples did, indeed, go to the uttermost part of the earth, preaching to every creature. “Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). Peter, prompted by inspiration and visions, went to the house of Cornelius the centurion,

And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. . . . While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. (Acts 10:28, 44–48)

There were many situations when the Apostles anciently were embarrassed, to say the least, with the question as to whether or not to do things in common with the Gentiles. Paul had occasion to reprimand Peter once because Peter was reluctant to eat with Gentile converts in the presence of Jews (Gal. 2:11–14). Chapter 15 of the Acts of the Apostles gives an account of a long dispute originating from Antioch as to what people were to do to qualify to be accepted into the Church. Paul and Barnabas returned to Jerusalem for a solution, at which meeting James concluded, “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from





Courtesy Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

**FIG. 1-1.** David O. McKay, president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1951–1970, struggled with the question of the blacks and the priesthood. During his term as president, many letters arrived at Church headquarters from Africans who wanted to join the Church.

fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:19–20).

This difficult situation of the Saints in ancient times, this dilemma to grant or not to grant some groups full membership with the Saints, did repeat itself, as history always does, during our dispensation, this dispensation of the fullness of times. David O. McKay (fig. 1-1), president of the restored Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was faced with a similar situation in June 1961. Regarding this, Church history scholar James B. Allen wrote:

President McKay commented that they were facing a problem even greater than that faced by the Twelve in New Testament times when the question of whether the gentiles should have the gospel shook the Church. The Lord would have to let them know what to do, he said, and when he was ready he would open the door. Until then they would have to tell the people they could go so far and no farther.<sup>1</sup>

This was the time when lots of letters from Nigeria were pressuring the Church headquarters in Salt Lake City to



Courtesy Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

**FIG. 1-2.** LaMar S. Williams (1963) was set apart by President McKay to open a mission of the Church in West Africa.

establish the Church in their black West African country.

Before the Church officially established its presence in Ghana, many activities of preparation took place both in Nigeria and Ghana on the one side and in Church headquarters in Salt Lake City in the United States of America on the other. This was the time when the Church was struggling with a policy that no black person was to bear the holy priesthood of God.

There were several black members of the Church in America and Europe, but none of them was ordained to bear the priesthood. And without priesthood leaders, it was impossible to organise the Church, so it was impractical to do missionary work in Africa. It is recorded in Allen's article that "contact between the Church and black Africans goes back at least to 1946, when O. J. Umordak" wrote, with a reminder a year later, to the South African mission president asking for literature and missionaries. The letters were referred to the General Authorities in Salt Lake City, who decided to postpone an answer.<sup>2</sup>

During the presidency of David O. McKay, who became President of the Church in 1951, "small but significant shifts

in policy occurred that may have helped prepare Church members for the dramatic change of policy twenty-seven years later."<sup>3</sup> In 1959, LaMar S. Williams (fig. 1-2), whose duty it was to respond to letters of inquiry at the Missionary Department, received a letter from a "Reverend Honesty John Ekong from Abak Zone in Nigeria . . . [asking for] missionaries, more literature, and the name and address of the closest ranch." Williams sent the literature and began correspondence, all under the direction of Gordon B. Hinckley, then head of the Missionary Department. Realising that Honesty John was black and in Africa, Williams was aware that they had to "tread carefully" in setting up correspondence with him."<sup>4</sup>

In 1960, the First Presidency, being fully aware of what was happening, "asked Glen G. Fisher (fig. 1-3), [returning] president of the South African Mission, to visit Nigeria." He reported to the First Presidency that he "met with several groups that had obtained Church literature, believed it, organized themselves the best they could . . . , and looked to Utah for help." Fisher said the Nigerians "did not seem too concerned [when he told them that they could



Courtesy Harold B. Lee Library, Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University

**FIG. 1-3.** Glen G. Fisher, president of the South African Mission, 1957–1960, went on a fact-finding trip into West Africa in 1960.

not hold the priesthood] though he was not sure they fully understood what that meant.”<sup>5</sup> Evidently, holding the priesthood had not been a significant issue in the churches they were used to. Fisher said that the Church “had been invited to ‘superintend’ their work” in Nigeria, and “he believed that if an organization could be set up, even without the priesthood, the people could carry on and do a tremendous amount of good.”<sup>6</sup> This suggestion did not go down well with the First Presidency, who concluded that it would be bad to single out Nigeria for such a preferential consideration.

On 22 June [1961] President McKay expressed his feeling that [the First Presidency] had an inescapable obligation to permit the Nigerians to be baptized if they were converted and worthy, though they should understand that they could not perform ordinances or hold the priesthood.<sup>7</sup>

On 30 June 1961, there was further consideration of this issue, which was “problematic, for never before had the Church considered organizing branches in areas where new members could not function in the priesthood.”<sup>8</sup> This was a dilemma for President McKay. He commented that the First Presidency’s situation was akin to the ancient Apostles’ when the time came to take the gospel to the uttermost part of the world. The difference between the circumstances of the earlier day Church of Jesus Christ and this latter-day, restored Church of Jesus Christ were possibly (1) the speed with which information could travel and (2) the political situation. The Jews and the Gentiles had no such situation as there was between the black African and the white man.

On 6 March 1957, Ghana achieved her independence, followed by Nigeria on 1 October 1960.<sup>9</sup> The Church must have been aware that colonialism and its agents had become

unacceptable and that Christianity had been labelled in some places in Africa as the white man's culture. African nationalists were at that time using all means to extricate themselves from colonial remnants and paternalism. It was felt, therefore, that African groups looking outside of Africa for affiliation with and guidance in anything would be contrary to the wind of change that was blowing across the continent.

In the midst of this political environment, Church leaders decided to spend time investigating further the possibilities of missionary work in Nigeria, rather than sending someone to Nigeria to baptise those who were waiting. This, however, was erroneous counsel considering the sincerity of the Nigerians and the Ghanaians who organised The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in their various countries, as you will read further on.

On 26 February 1962, it was decided to take the gospel to Nigeria. LaMar S. and Nyal B. Williams would be the first missionary couple. On 9 April, he was authorised to send news to the Nigerians that he would leave after the October conference.<sup>10</sup>

On 21 November [1962], Williams was set apart by President McKay as the first missionary "to the nation of Nigeria where you have been called by the inspiration of the Lord and the pleading of many citizens of that country to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . This is a new appointment, a new assignment, not only to you individually but to the entire Church, going to a people not entitled to hold the priesthood but entitled to other blessings of the Church, including eternal life in the Celestial Kingdom. We bless you that you may have sympathy for the people in this work and recognize their citizenship in the kingdom of God."<sup>11</sup>

The blessings pronounced upon Williams were very significant with respect to falsehoods peddled by persecutors from without the Church and also by some Church members who may have had a racial bias.

On 11 January 1963, a public announcement of the mission to Nigeria was made,<sup>12</sup> and on 20 June, the Williamses were given a missionary farewell in sacrament meeting of their ward. This farewell was premature.

On 7 June 1963 *The New York Times* carried an article announcing that the Church was reconsidering its priesthood policy and quoting Hugh B. Brown, Second Counselor in the First Presidency. "We are in the midst of a survey looking toward the possibility of admitting Negroes. . . . Believing as we do in divine revelation through the President of the church, we all await his decision. . . . The whole problem of the Negro is being considered . . . in the light of racial relations everywhere."<sup>13</sup>

After a prolonged struggle to obtain Nigerian visas, the uncertainties about organising the Latter-day Saint Church in Africa without the priesthood and also the prolonged and enduring patience, otherwise termed long-suffering, of the African "would-be" LDS members, that great missionary for Africa, LaMar Williams, finally had the green light to carry on with the work. On 6 November 1965, when the Williamses were in Nigeria, their visa was extended another ninety days, and arrangements were made to have the Church officially registered in Nigeria. At 11.25 A.M. the same day, however, a telegram from the First Presidency came to order that LaMar Williams must "discontinue negotiations in Nigeria and return home immediately." At 2.30 on the afternoon of that same day, "stunned and confused, Williams was on a plane for London."<sup>14</sup>

For the next thirteen years, Church leaders maintained an official hands-off position toward the Saints in Africa. There were no records on the reasons behind the reversal of the First Presidency decision, but “in January 1966 . . . only two months later, a violent military coup became the opening blow of the Biafran War, a bloody civil conflict in which few lives were safe.” Williams “felt that the Lord had something to do with getting [him] out of” the conflict zone.<sup>15</sup>

“And when [the Lord] was ready he would open the door,” said President McKay.<sup>16</sup> It wasn’t time to get the Church established. In July 1966, there was a bloody countercoup in Nigeria, and in May 1967, Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu<sup>17</sup> declared the Eastern Region to be the Independent State of Biafra. The renewed carnage caused by this declaration ended in January 1970. In September 1978, a ban on political parties, in force since 1966, finally ended. This time, the Church was ready to come into Africa with the priesthood, and Africa was ready for the Church.

## Notes

1. James B. Allen, “Would-Be Saints: West Africa before the 1978 Priesthood Revelation,” *Journal of Mormon History* 17 (1991): 216.
2. Allen, “Would-Be Saints,” 212.
3. Allen, “Would-Be Saints,” 212.
4. Allen, “Would-Be Saints,” 213.
5. Allen, “Would-Be Saints,” 213.
6. Allen, “Would-Be Saints,” 214.
7. Allen, “Would-Be Saints,” 216.
8. Allen, “Would-Be Saints,” 216.
9. Both Ghana and Nigeria had been British colonies. Prior to independence, Ghana was known as the Gold Coast.

10. Allen, "Would-Be Saints," 227.
11. Allen, "Would-Be Saints," 228.
12. See appendix 1.
13. Allen, "Would-Be Saints," 231.
14. Allen, "Would-Be Saints," 236.
15. Allen, "Would-Be Saints," 236–37.
16. Allen, "Would-Be Saints," 216.
17. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, born in 1933, served as president of Biafra from 30 May 1967 to 8 January 1970. B. Schemmel, *Rulers*, <http://www.rulers.org/ruln2.html#nigeria>, s.v. "Barbados," accessed 6 June 2003.