



True and Faithful—The Hand of the Lord in Our Region

Introduction

This lesson is about the history of the Church in the Philadelphia temple district and has been created to help you better prepare for the dedication of the Philadelphia temple. While the lesson includes a few highlights of historical people and events, its primary purpose is to help you achieve the following spiritual goals:

- Understand how the Lord has inspired and directed individuals over the years to bring to pass His work in establishing His Church in this area.
- Feel inspired by the example of early historical figures and Saints to do your part in building the Lord’s kingdom and accomplishing His work, especially the work that can be performed in the temple.
- Understand the legacy left by early founders and Saints, thereby choosing to leave a legacy of faithfulness for others to follow.

1. Setting the Foundation

President Ezra Taft Benson taught that “all of the great events that have transpired [in America], including the coming of Columbus and of the Pilgrim Fathers, were foreseen by ancient prophets.” (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 575.)

We often read the scripture regarding Columbus (see 1 Nephi 13:12), but may overlook the role of “other Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:13). President Benson wrote, “The Pilgrims of Plymouth, the Calverts of Maryland, Roger Williams, William Penn—all had deep religious convictions that played a principal part in their coming to the New World. They too, I believe, came here under the inspiration of heaven.” (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 569.)



William Penn as a Naval Officer

William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, was among those “other Gentiles” and was instrumental in establishing the foundation for religious freedom in America. After experiencing the persecution of the Quakers as they tried to practice their faith in England, Penn proposed to King Charles II of England that land be gifted to him as payment of a debt owed by the king to his father in America. In 1681 William was granted a charter of land (later named Pennsylvania) where he created a colony that became a model of religious tolerance. In his book, *William Penn and the Quaker Legacy*, John A. Moretta wrote, “His [Penn’s] proprietary powers far exceeded those granted to any other individual,” and “the generosity shown to Penn ran completely counter to what the Crown was doing elsewhere in North America.” The parcel of land was uncharacteristically large, and Penn’s control over it allowed him much discretionary political control, suggesting divine intervention.

William Penn wanted to design a colony and government that would implement his religious ideals. He envisioned that his colony would be “the seed of a nation.” He granted freedom of religion for everyone who believed in God. Penn wrote over twenty drafts of his “Framework of Government,” for which he borrowed many ideas from John Locke (an 18th-century English philosopher who also had considerable influence on the work of Thomas Jefferson). The state of Pennsylvania (meaning “Penn’s woods”) was



born, and the foundation principles for the American Constitution were set in place. (Penn quotation referenced in www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/William_Penn.)

On the occasion of the Church’s centennial in 1930, the First Presidency of the Church declared: “It was not by chance that the Puritans left their native land and sailed away to the shores of New England, and that others followed later. They were the advance guard of the army of the Lord, [foreordained] to establish the God-given system of government under which we live ... and prepare the way for the restoration of the Gospel of Christ.” (James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 5:279-280.)

Discussion Questions:

Why is William Penn such a revered person to Latter-day Saints?

If you were to write a letter to William Penn, what would you say to him?

2. The Founding of the United States and the Expansion of Religious Freedom

Philadelphia’s establishment happened over a nearly 70-year period. Its prime location with access to the Delaware Bay and the Atlantic Ocean helped it to become an important mid-Atlantic port. Pennsylvania’s legal framework and religious diversity led Philadelphia to become the desired meeting place for the First Continental Congress in September 1774. Then, with the signing of the Declaration of Independence and later the ratification of the Constitution of the United States, the Lord established a nation with a tradition of religious freedom. The Lord prophesied to the ancient Nephites:

“For it is wisdom in the Father that they [the Gentiles or peoples of western Europe] should be established in this land [the Americas], and be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that these things [the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Book of Mormon] might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed, that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel” (3 Nephi 21:4).

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles observed, “The success of the Declaration of Independence and the Revolutionary War came about through men who were raised up by God for this special purpose. ... You merely need to study history to recognize that a group of fledgling colonies defeating the world’s most powerful nation stemmed from a force greater than man. Where else in the world do we find a group of men together in one place at one time who possessed greater capacity and wisdom than the founding fathers—Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, and others? But it was not to their own abilities that they gave the credit. They acknowledged Almighty God and were certain of the impossibility of their success without his help. ...

“We believe that the Constitution was brought about by God to insure a nation where liberty could abound, where his gospel could flourish. Joseph Smith said, “The Constitution of the United States is a glorious standard; it is founded in the wisdom of God. It is a heavenly banner” (www.lds.org/new-era/1976/07/gods-hand-in-the-founding-of-america).

Read D&C 101:80. (Note whose words these are!)

Have you visited Independence Hall in Philadelphia? What was your experience like?



Howard Chandler Christy's *Scene at the Signing of the Constitution of the United States*

President Wilford Woodruff declared that “those men who laid the foundation of this American government and signed the Declaration of Independence were the best spirits the God of heaven could find on the face of the earth. They were ... were inspired of the Lord” (*Conference Report*, Apr. 1898, 89).

In *Wise Men Raised Up*, by Frank W. Fox and LeGrand L. Baker, we read: “The creation of such a government was a necessary prerequisite to the restoration of the gospel. There would have been little point in the Lord’s establishing his Church among people who were not free to accept it. For a thousand years he had carefully prepared the world for the restoration of the gospel, and the American Constitutional Convention was one of the final events in that preparation.”

Discussion Questions:

What conditions would need to be present in a nation in order for a restoration of truth to take place? Perched above the Philadelphia city skyline are statues of William Penn and the Angel Moroni. What do you think of this pairing?

3. The Restoration of the Priesthood and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon

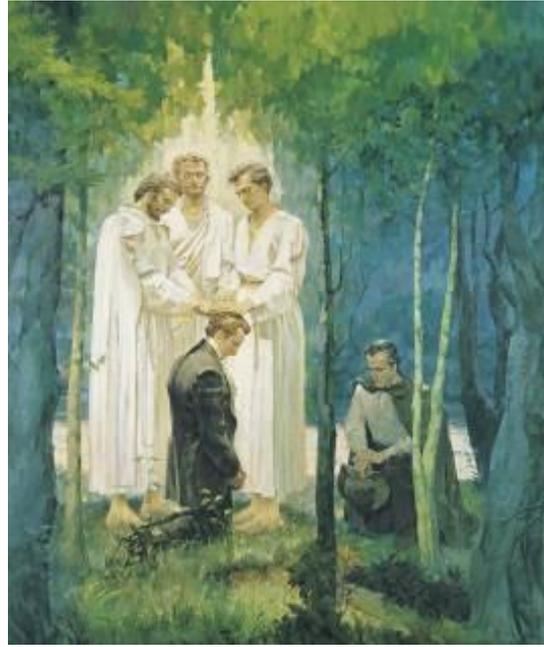
The religious freedom William Penn envisioned, and the establishment of the United States, created an environment where a diversity of religious belief could flourish. In 1823 the Lord directed Joseph



Smith—through the Angel Moroni—to translate the Book of Mormon from gold plates. Much of the translation work was accomplished in Pennsylvania.



The Restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, by Del Parson



The Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, by Del Parsons

“While translating 3 Nephi, the Prophet Joseph and Oliver Cowdery went into the wilderness along the banks of the Susquehanna on 15 May 1829 and in supplication to the Lord asked for guidance relative to priesthood authority and the power to baptize ... John the Baptist responded to their cry in the wilderness and conferred upon them the Aaronic Priesthood...

“The heavenly messenger [John the Baptist] informed the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery that he had been sent by the ancient Apostles Peter, James, and John and that they would be the recipients of the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood under the hands of these ancient gospel ministrants. Those ordinations soon followed “in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna County, and Colesville, Broome county, on the Susquehanna River.” (*Ensign*, Feb. 2001 and *Ensign*, Dec. 1996, 30–47.) See also D&C 13; 128:20.

The Book of Mormon was later published in 1830.

Discussion Question:

Have you or your family visited the newly-renovated Priesthood Restoration Site in our temple district? Invite those who have been there to share their experiences.

4. The Prophet Joseph Smith and Early Philadelphia Area Church History

Since 1837 missionaries have proselyted in the Philadelphia area, beginning with Don Carlos Smith, Joseph Smith’s younger brother. Jedediah M. Grant, later a member of the Church’s First Presidency and father of President Heber J. Grant, recorded in his journal in 1838 that in company with others he traveled through New Jersey to Philadelphia “preaching by the way.” By the end of 1838 there were over 100 members of the Church in the area.



In May 1839 missionary efforts were formalized with the organization of the Eastern States Mission. In November 1839 Elder Parley P. Pratt reported there was a “flourishing branch of the Church in Philadelphia, where the presiding elder, Benjamin Winchester, had hired a good hall in which the Elders preached to crowded audiences.”

While spending time in Washington, D.C. seeking redress for the loss of property of the Missouri Saints, Joseph Smith spent several weeks in our area, arriving in Philadelphia by railway on December 21, 1839. He “spent several days preaching and visiting from house to house, among the brethren and others.” Joseph formally organized the Philadelphia Branch on December 23, 1839 in a meeting house just a few blocks for today’s temple site. He likely called on the Thomas L. Kane family, friends who had saved his life from the mob in Far West, Missouri and whose home was in Philadelphia. He spent several days in the city before going with Elder Orson Pratt to visit the Saints in New Jersey.



Joseph Smith, Jr., Lewis A. Ramsey

On January 9, 1840 Joseph returned to Philadelphia. He along with other leaders of the Church held a conference on January 13th. At this conference the Prophet spoke on the Priesthood and related duties. This was a marvelous event attended by Sidney Rigdon, Orson Pratt, Parley P. Pratt, and other Church elders. Of this conference Parley P. Pratt wrote:

“While visiting with Brother Joseph in Philadelphia, a very large church was opened for him to preach in, and about three thousand people assembled to hear him. Brother Rigdon spoke first, and dwelt on the Gospel, illustrating his doctrine by the Bible. When he was through, Brother Joseph arose like a lion about to roar; and being full of the Holy Ghost, spoke in great power, bearing testimony of the visions he had seen, the ministering of angels which he had enjoyed; and how he had found the plates of the Book of Mormon, and translated them by the gift

and power of God. He commenced by saying: ‘If nobody else had the courage to testify of so glorious a message from Heaven, and of the finding of so glorious a record, he felt to do it in justice to the people, and leave the event with God.’ The entire congregation were astounded; electrified, as it were, and overwhelmed with the sense of the truth and power by which he spoke, and the wonders which he related. A lasting impression was made; many souls were gathered into the fold. And I bear witness, that he, by his faithful and powerful testimony, cleared his garments of their blood. Multitudes were baptized in Philadelphia and in the regions around.”
(Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, 298–99.)

On January 20th Joseph left the city and traveled to Chester County, Pennsylvania. Lorenzo Barnes recorded, “On Saturday last (Jan. 25) a conference of elders was held in the Brandywine branch; pres't. [President] Joseph Smith Jr. being present, was called to preside, and James Rodeback appointed clerk. Two elders and two priests were ordained; great harmony prevailed in the meeting, and much important instruction was given to the elders and members present by pres't Smith. The saints in that place appear determined to keep the commandments of God; and the visit of brother Smith among them, I trust has tended much to strengthen, and confirm them in the faith of the everlasting gospel” *(Times and Seasons 1 (March 1840): 79).*



Church membership in the area continued to grow, and at a Philadelphia meeting in June 1843 presided over by Brigham Young it was reported that about 300 Saints were present. Eventually the Church grew to over 1,000 members in 16 congregations, one of the largest communities of Saints outside of Nauvoo, Illinois.

The map shows the branches that were formed in the region during the late 1830s and 1840s (see *Discord in the City of Brotherly Love: The Story of Early Mormonism in Philadelphia*, Mormon Historical Studies, Vol. 5, No. 1).

Discussion Question:

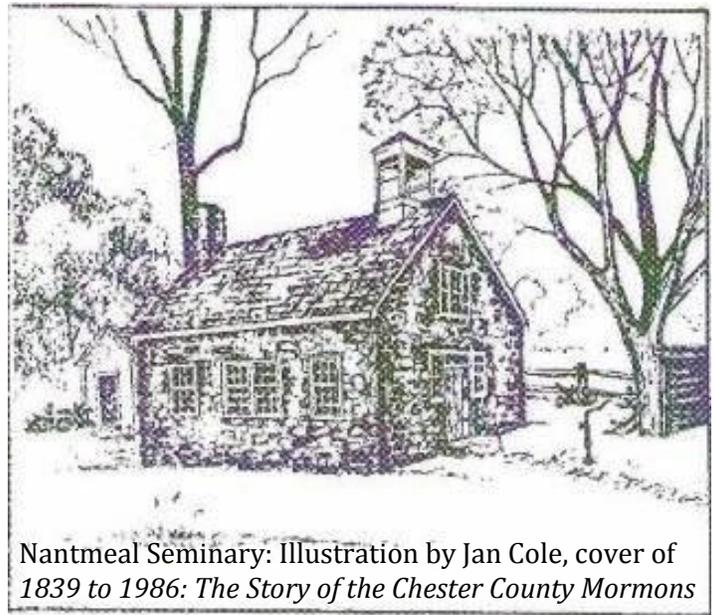
Why do you think the missionaries found so much success in the Philadelphia area?

Do you know of anyone who was baptized into the Church in your area during 1839-1850?

5. Early Faithful Members—Chester County Highlights

While many areas surrounding Philadelphia had groups of Saints, one area of particular note is Chester County, Pennsylvania, one of the original three counties organized by William Penn. Chester County attracted many early Quaker settlers, primarily from England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, seeking religious freedom in the New World. Many of their descendants joined the Church, and as they migrated west in the 1850s, about 500 people would list their birthplace as “Chester County, Pennsylvania.” This list includes Margaret Peirce, a member of the family that helped establish Longwood Gardens, and Henry Grow, Jr, the engineer and architect of the Tabernacle on Temple Square. Other prominent family names include Dilworth, Woolley, Leonard, Hoopes, Yearsley, and Willis. The hand of the Lord is seen in how these individuals and their posterity provided strength to the Church in the West.

One noteworthy person is Edward Hunter, a prominent community member and prosperous farmer, who played a major role in ensuring religious freedom in Chester County. Of this he wrote, “I always had an inquiry of the Lord as to how I could worship him acceptably. My father told me to belong to no religious sect, but to keep sacred that all men have the right to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences... I attended different places of worship and sustained all sects in the right to worship God in their own way, but could not connect myself with any of them. I was called on to give the privilege to have erected on my land, on the site of an old school house which had burned down, a house for educational purposes [known as Nantmeal Seminary] and also for holding meetings. I agreed to give the land for ninety-nine years and help build the house, if they would



Nantmeal Seminary: Illustration by Jan Cole, cover of 1839 to 1986: *The Story of the Chester County Mormons*



allow all persons and persuasions to meet in it to worship God. This was particularly stated in the articles of agreement” (1839 to 1986: *The Story of the Chester County Mormons*).

After migrating to Utah, Edward Hunter became the third presiding bishop of the Church, serving longer in this position than any other person in Church history. The many generations of strong Church members and leaders that followed are a tribute to these early Saints, who left the comfort of their homes and the security of their farms and businesses to help establish Zion in Nauvoo and the West.

Discussion Questions:

Do you know of anyone who, like Edward Hunter, is an example to the Church in your area? Share stories and invite class members to share stories about them.

What assistance are you in a position to provide to the Lord’s work in your area?

6. Philadelphia City Highlights

While Church members in the city of Philadelphia met in various locations in the early years, the first Church-built meetinghouse was located at 316 South 46th Street in West Philadelphia. The beautiful stone structure was dedicated in 1938 by President Heber J. Grant, son of one of the first Philadelphia branch presidents. The Saints met there until 1977, when all Church members in the city were reassigned to the suburban units.

In 1980 the first new unit in the city, the Metro Branch, was organized and began meeting on the Philadelphia Navy Base. In 1984 the boundaries of the branch were expanded to include most of the city, and a new “Metro Ward,” with over 900 members, was organized and moved to a temporary meeting place near 40th and Market Streets in West Philadelphia. In February 1988 the Church dedicated a new meetinghouse at 3913 Chestnut Street, just a block from the temporary meeting place. It is the oldest Church-owned meetinghouse in city of Philadelphia.

AN INVITATION




**DEDICATION OF THE NEW
PHILADELPHIA MEETING HOUSE
3913 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Sunday, February 21, 1988
2:30 PM**

**Dedicatory Prayer by
John K. Carmack of the
First Quorum of Seventy**

EXPECTED SPECIAL GUESTS INCLUDE:

Alfred E. Southgate
Joseph T. Lindsey
Loran D. Stephenson
Lowell S. Young
John D. Suckles
Julian M.F. San
Felix Rivera
C. Nelson Dorny
Felix Rivera
The Stephenson Family Strings

(Left, the first Church-owned meetinghouse in Philadelphia, on South 46th Street. Right, the 39th Street Chapel, oldest Church-owned meetinghouse in Philadelphia.)

In June 1991 the units in Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey were reorganized into the Philadelphia Pennsylvania District of the Pennsylvania Philadelphia Mission (later known as the Metro District). It originally included seven branches in the inner-city neighborhoods, allowing residents—many [of whom lacked] private transportation—to attend meetings and experience the blessings of the gospel in their lives. Five additional branches were later established in the District (*Church News*: Saturday, July 25, 1992).

The Spanish and the Asian-language speaking members of the Philadelphia Stake were transferred to this new Metro District under the direction of the mission president. (Marion Frasier, *Land of Liberty*, © 2005.)

Forty-two missionaries and nine missionary couples were assigned to the district and over 1,000 people were baptized between 1991 and 1999, many from the two



waves of immigration to the United States at that time from Southeast Asia and western Africa. The number of branches eventually totaled 15.

The mission district was dissolved in 1999, and its members split between two suburban stakes. One example of note occurred in North Philadelphia. After meeting for years in a renovated funeral home, a new chapel was built on this site for the Hunting Park and Logan wards. The new building generated great interest in the Church in the North Philadelphia community, and the mission president reassigned more missionaries to these wards. The Logan Ward history records that five to six people were baptized every week, with about 350 baptisms the first year, 250 the next, and 150 the third. After three years the number of missionaries in the city was reduced.

Teacher’s Note: If your class members are not associated with the city of Philadelphia, you may want to substitute the story of the Church in your area at this point in your presentation.

Discussion Question:

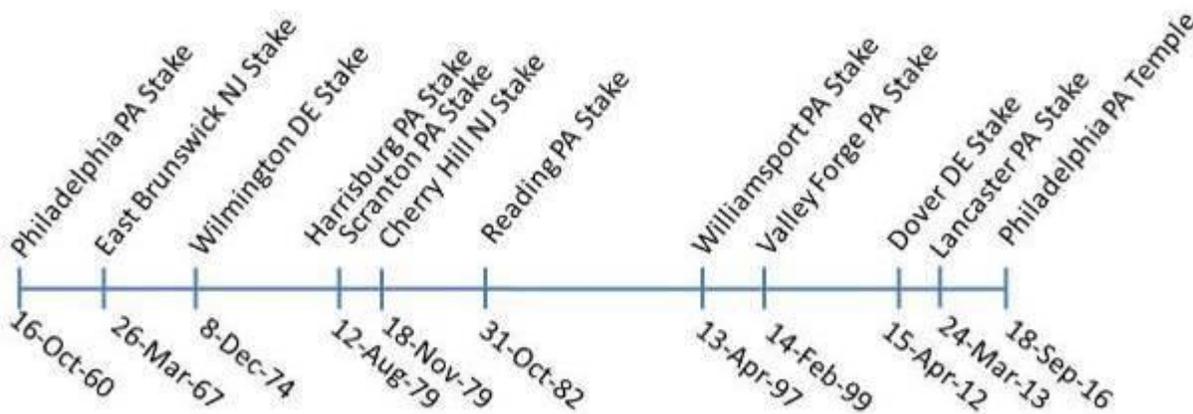
What thoughts and feelings does understanding the story of the Church in your area inspire in you?

7. From One Stake to Eleven

The area of the Philadelphia Temple District, once known as the East Penn District, was a large part of the original Eastern States Mission. Eventually the East Central States Mission was formed, with headquarters in Philadelphia. In 1960 the Philadelphia Pennsylvania Stake was created, having six wards and branches in southeastern Pennsylvania with 1,100 members in New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland” (Marion Frasier, *Land of Liberty* © 2005 and *Church News*: February 2, 2010).

Read D&C 82:14. What do you think “beautiful garments” is referring to?

Since the formation of the first Philadelphia Stake, the Church has grown steadily, as represented in the following timeline, which shows when each of the stakes in our temple district was organized.



Since its beginning as part of the mission district to its current number of eleven stakes in the temple district, the growth of the Church in this area is a witness to the Lord’s prophecy that the gospel would fill the whole earth, as He gathers an ever-increasing number of individuals and families into the fold of the restored gospel (See D&C 65:2).



Discussion Questions:

What blessings have come to members of your stake since it was formed?

What can we do to bring these blessings to others?

Teacher’s Note: You may want to review how members can participate with others in the temple dedication events and work of the temple after dedication.

8. Conclusion

From the foundational events in the 1600s, with William Penn and others, to the opening era of divine revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith, to the early days of missionary zeal, preaching, and growth, through the lull of activity in the late 1800s as the Church established itself in the West, and finally to the gradual establishment and expansion of the Church in this area, culminating in the dedication of a temple, the hand of the Lord has guided and preserved the work of His Kingdom in this choice land in and around the woods of William Penn.

Surely the Lord’s hand has been and is evident in the establishment of Zion in our homes and communities. Now we have a temple in our midst in fulfillment of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s testimony that the Church would fill North and South America. (See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, 137.) See also D&C 115:5–6.

The recently-called Philadelphia Pennsylvania Temple president has observed:

“I have often asked myself the question, ‘Why did the Lord want a temple in Philadelphia?’ As I have pondered on this I believe He wants us to increase both the frequency and intensity of our personal interactions with Him. Therefore, the Lord wants to be physically closer to us.

“I also think there is something very meaningful about having a temple here in the birthplace of freedom. Just a few blocks from where the Declaration of Independence was signed and the Constitution was written now stands The House of The Lord. I believe that we will see the Spirit of the Lord poured out throughout the entire area in miraculous ways. This temple will bless all of our lives” (President Bruce R. Winn, Philadelphia Pennsylvania Temple).