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Church Announces Purchase of Historic Kirtland Temple, Other Historic Sites and Manuscripts

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints jointly announced the sale with the Community of Christ, formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints



The sun rises on the Kirtland Ohio Temple in Kirtland, Ohio on Saturday, Aug. 26, 2023. | Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints now owns the historic Kirtland Temple and other property from the Community of Christ, the two churches said Tuesday in a joint announcement.

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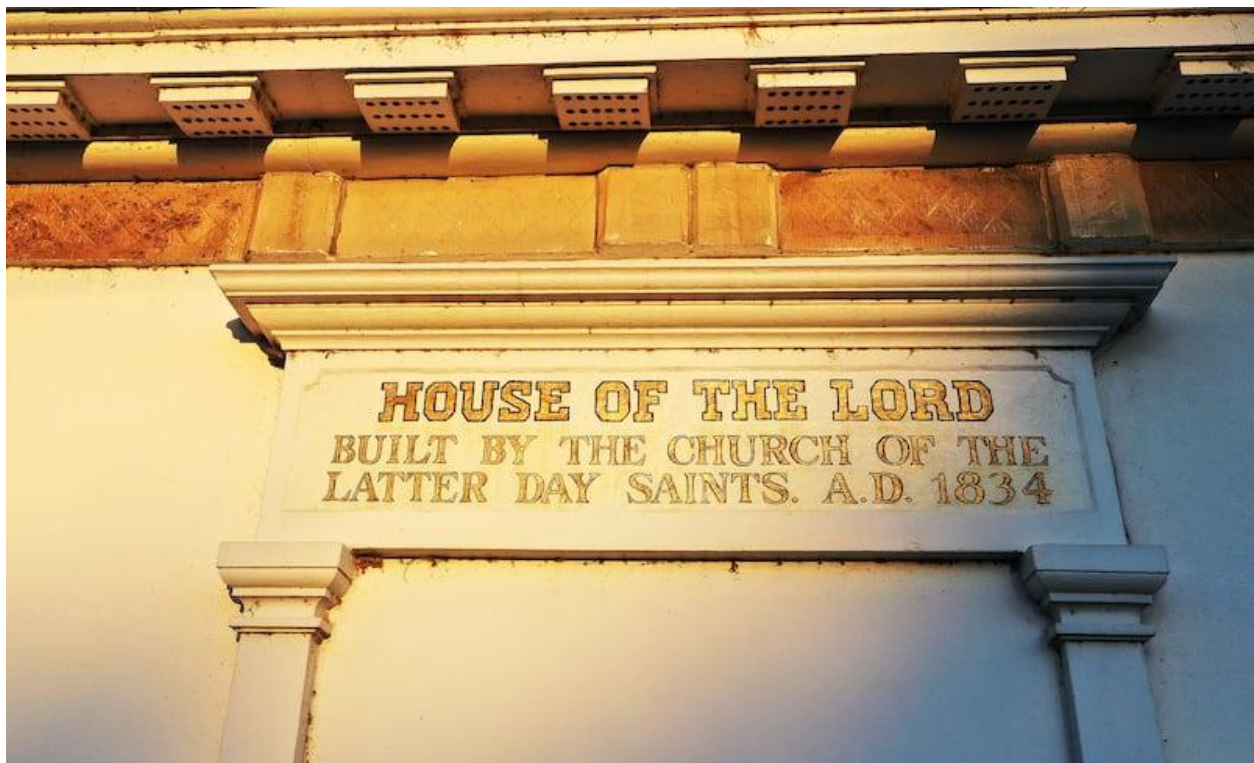
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The Kirtland Temple has immense historic and religious significance to millions of Latter-day Saints and others who consider it sacred because it both is the first temple completed after the founding of the Church of Jesus Christ in 1830 and is a place Latter-day Saints believe Jesus Christ [appeared](#) days after Joseph Smith dedicated it in 1836.

“We are deeply honored to assume the stewardship of these sacred places, documents and artifacts,” President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints said in the joint statement. “We thank our friends at Community of Christ for their great care and cooperation in preserving these historical treasures thus far. We are committed to doing the same.”

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The sun rises on the Kirtland Ohio Temple in Kirtland, Ohio on Saturday, Aug. 26, 2023. | Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News

Persecution caused the Latter-day Saints to leave Kirtland, Ohio in 1838, and ownership of the temple, which had resided with Joseph Smith, became cloudy after his murder in 1844.

The Community of Christ, previously known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, had been the primary steward of the temple for more than 140 years.

The two churches had been working on the transfer of ownership since 2021, the joint statement said. The churches are [respectful](#) of each other, and the Community of Christ

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previously had sold historic sites in Missouri and Ohio to the Church of Jesus Christ [in 2012](#) and the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon [in 2017](#).

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The latest transfer of historic sites and documents involves dozens of items and buildings, including church history sites in Nauvoo, Illinois. Those include buildings of note within Church history, such as the Red Brick Store, where the Relief Society, the Church's global women's organization, was first organized. Other sites include the Joseph and Emma Smith Mansion House, the Nauvoo House and the Smith Family Homestead.

The Bible used in the Joseph Smith translation of the Bible was also part of the sale, as was the original door of Liberty Jail and many other items and manuscripts. According to a question and answer released on the church's Newsroom website, the purchase price of the historic sites and documents was \$192.5 million.

The Kirtland Temple is the centerpiece. It was nominated [as a National Historic Landmark](#) in 1969 and designated one in 1976.



The sun rises on the Kirtland Ohio Temple in Kirtland, Ohio on Saturday, Aug. 26, 2023. | Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News

But beyond its significance to the early history of both churches, the temple is sacred because of what one Latter-day Saint leader called “the great pentecostal outpouring that Joseph and the Saints [received in Kirtland](#).”

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“There is something unique and wonderful about what happened here,” late church President Gordon B. Hinckley [said](#) in 2003. “Nothing like it has occurred anywhere else in the history of the church, either before or since.”

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Joseph Smith reported that the spiritual priesthood keys to operating Christ’s ancient church were restored by three angelic visitors at the Kirtland Temple — Moses, Elias and Elijah, who restored the power to sealing families together forever, a linchpin of the Latter-day Saint faith. Today, the church operates 188 temples around the world. It has plans to build 147 more.

The Reorganized Church — which became the Community of Christ [in 2001](#) — obtained the Kirtland Temple through Joseph Smith’s son. Joseph Smith III bought the temple through a quit-claim deed in 1874. He gave the property to the Reorganized Church in 1880 and the title was finalized in 1901.

The Kirtland Temple operated as much as a meetinghouse as a temple before Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saints left Kirtland. Church members used it as a meetinghouse for Sunday worship services and Thursday prayer and fasting meetings. They also used it as a regular school and for a church choir.

Today, Latter-day Saint temples open to the public briefly after new construction or renovations, then are dedicated for the purpose of performing temple ordinances carried out by Latter-day Saints with active temple recommends. The Community of Christ has used the Kirtland Temple for various meetings and has opened it to the public for tours. The Church of Jesus Christ said that the Kirtland Temple will remain a historic building open to the public.

The church said it will reopen the temple to free public tours on March 25.

The Community of Christ will be given special access to use the Kirtland Temple for some meetings.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a fully functioning temple in Columbus, Ohio, and a second temple in the state, in Cleveland, is under construction.

Community of Christ President Stephen M. Veazey said the funds from the sale will bolster the endowments used to pay for many of the church’s missions.

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For a virtual tour of the Kirtland Temple, click [here](#).

Read the full joint statement by the two churches

This is the full [joint statement](#) from the Community of Christ and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

Today, Tuesday, March 5, 2024, the responsibility and ownership for the Kirtland Temple, several historic buildings in Nauvoo and various manuscripts and artifacts officially transferred from Community of Christ to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for an agreed-upon amount. Together, we share an interest in and reverence for these historic sites and items and are committed to preserving them for future generations.

Discussions leading to this landmark agreement commenced in June 2021. “This exchange of assets is significant for our church,” said Stephen M. Veazey, president of Community of Christ. “Through funding from increased endowments, Community of Christ will have greater capacity to pursue our mission priorities around the world, including continuing to fulfill the divinely envisioned purposes for our Temple in Independence, Missouri.”

“We are deeply honored to assume the stewardship of these sacred places, documents, and artifacts,” said Russell M. Nelson, president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. “We thank our friends at Community of Christ for their great care and cooperation in preserving these historical treasures thus far. We are committed to doing the same.”

The Kirtland Temple will remain an historic building. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints plans to reopen it March 25, 2024, for public tours at no charge. Likewise, in Nauvoo, the Smith Family Homestead, the Mansion House and the Red Brick Store will also reopen on March 25, 2024, for year-round public tours at no charge. More details about the transaction, assets, and the other items included in the agreement will be forthcoming.

The historic transfer underscores our long-standing effort to preserve religious and cultural heritage and foster respective opportunities for growth and service to the world.

Community of Christ is an international faith community dedicated to fostering authentic connections with one another and with God. It strives to restore Christ’s peace on Earth and challenge unjust systems that diminish human worth. Community of Christ affirms the intrinsic worth of every person and provides a place to belong, be loved and valued, grow spiritually and discover a purpose that can change lives and communities.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a worldwide faith, teaches that our Father in Heaven and his Son Jesus Christ have in our day again called a living prophet and restored priesthood authority and covenants to bless families and individuals with joy. Members seek to

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live and share the gospel of Jesus Christ, care for those in need and unite families for eternity. They cherish the Book of Mormon and the Bible as holy scripture.

Frequently asked questions

The churches also released [a Q&A](#) with more information about the purchase:

“Today, Community of Christ and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced the transfer of significant historical properties and artifacts related to the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The following answers address frequently asked questions about the details of the transaction and future plans for the historic sites and artifacts.

1. What was included in the transaction?

The transaction involves land, buildings, artifacts and documents. The real estate, along with some artifacts, are in Kirtland, Ohio, and Nauvoo, Illinois, while artifacts and documents also come from Community of Christ Library and Archives in Independence, Missouri.

2. What are the most significant items?

The most significant properties are the Kirtland Temple, the Smith Family Homestead, the Mansion House, the Nauvoo House and the Red Brick Store. Significant documents and artifacts include manuscripts and the Bible used in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, seven letters from Joseph Smith to his wife Emma, John Whitmer’s history of the Church, original portraits of Joseph and Emma Smith, the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House, the original door of Liberty Jail and a document with the title of “Caractors,” which may contain a sample of inscriptions from the gold plates.

3. How did Community of Christ acquire these materials?

After the Saints left Kirtland in the 1830s, different parties controlled access to the temple over the years. In 1901, Community of Christ, then known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (“RLDS Church”) secured title to the Kirtland Temple through legal proceedings. The Smith family properties in Nauvoo remained in possession of Emma Smith after Joseph Smith’s death and she and her children eventually joined the RLDS Church. Thereafter, the properties passed through family connections to the RLDS Church. Other documents and artifacts were donated to the RLDS Church archives by their individual owners.

4. Why did Community of Christ sell these materials now?

As Community of Christ President Stephen M. Veazey noted in the joint statement, the transfer of materials at this time enables their mission and priorities around the world.

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5. Why did The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints purchase these materials?

The sites and artifacts in this transaction relate to significant events and people in the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

6. What is the relationship between the two churches?

The two churches enjoy a strong, respectful and friendly relationship. For many decades, we have collaborated on numerous historical and humanitarian projects.

7. Have there been previous transactions of historic materials between the two churches?

Yes. In 2012, Community of Christ sold to the Church of Jesus Christ several properties, including the Haw'n's Mill Massacre site and the Joseph and Emma Smith home in Kirtland. Five years later, Community of Christ sold the Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon to the Church of Jesus Christ.

8. What was paid for the properties, artifacts, and documents?

The church paid US\$192.5 million without assigning specific values to the properties and items.

9. Will the historic sites be open to the public?

Yes. The historic buildings in Kirtland and Nauvoo closed on March 5, 2024, to facilitate the transfer of ownership and will reopen to the public on March 25, 2024. Tours will be provided of the Kirtland Temple, the Smith Family Homestead, the Mansion House and the Red Brick Store. Updated visitor information will be published on the historic site webpages for Historic Kirtland and Historic Nauvoo.

10. Will admission be charged to visit the sites?

No. All of the Church of Jesus Christ's historic sites are open to the public at no charge.

11. Will members of Community of Christ continue to have access to the sites?

Yes. The sites will be open to the public generally. The church has also made specific arrangements with Community of Christ to allow for special meetings and gatherings over the coming years.

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12. Will the Kirtland Temple be converted into a functioning Latter-day Saint temple?

No. The Kirtland Temple will be maintained and presented as a historic building that is open to the public. President Russell M. Nelson announced a temple in Cleveland in April 2022, and the church released its site address in December 2022 and a rendering in July 2023.

13. Will the Church continue to pursue development of its proposed new visitors' center near the Nauvoo Temple?

Yes. The proposed visitors' center in Nauvoo will orient visitors to the historic and contemporary significance of the Nauvoo Temple. The use of the other two visitors' centers in Nauvoo will be determined in the future.

Dedicating another transferred property

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints bought 6,000 acres of Missouri farmland and the Hawn's Mill Massacre site and Far West Burying Ground in Missouri as well as Joseph and Emma Smith's Kirtland home from the Community of Christ in 2012.

Elder [David A. Bednar](#) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles dedicated the restored home on Aug. 26, 2023. The home near has views of the nearby Kirtland Temple.



The Kirtland Ohio Temple is seen through a window of the Joseph and Emma Smith home in August 2023.

“The first temple (was built) here in Kirtland and (we have) more than 300 temples today,” Elder Bednar said. “This work is true. It was in Kirtland that [Joseph said](#) that the church would grow, prosper and spread. It would fill North and South America. It would

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fill the world. That's true. I've been able to travel the world and see the fulfillment of that prophecy. So, coming to this place on this day is a sacred experience for me."



The sun rises on the Joseph and Emma Smith home in Kirtland, Ohio on Saturday, Aug. 26, 2023. | Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News



Tad Walch covers religion with a focus on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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