

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

# LDS Church Buys the Kirtland Temple, Historic Nauvoo Buildings and Artifacts for \$192M

1

TAMARA KEMSLEY & PEGGY FLETCHER STACK

*The structures will reopen to the public March 25.*



(The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) The Kirtland Temple in Kirtland, Ohio.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has bought a cherished piece of its history: the Kirtland Temple.

On Tuesday afternoon, the Salt Lake City-based faith announced the purchase of the valuable Ohio property, the first temple built by the followers of church founder Joseph Smith.

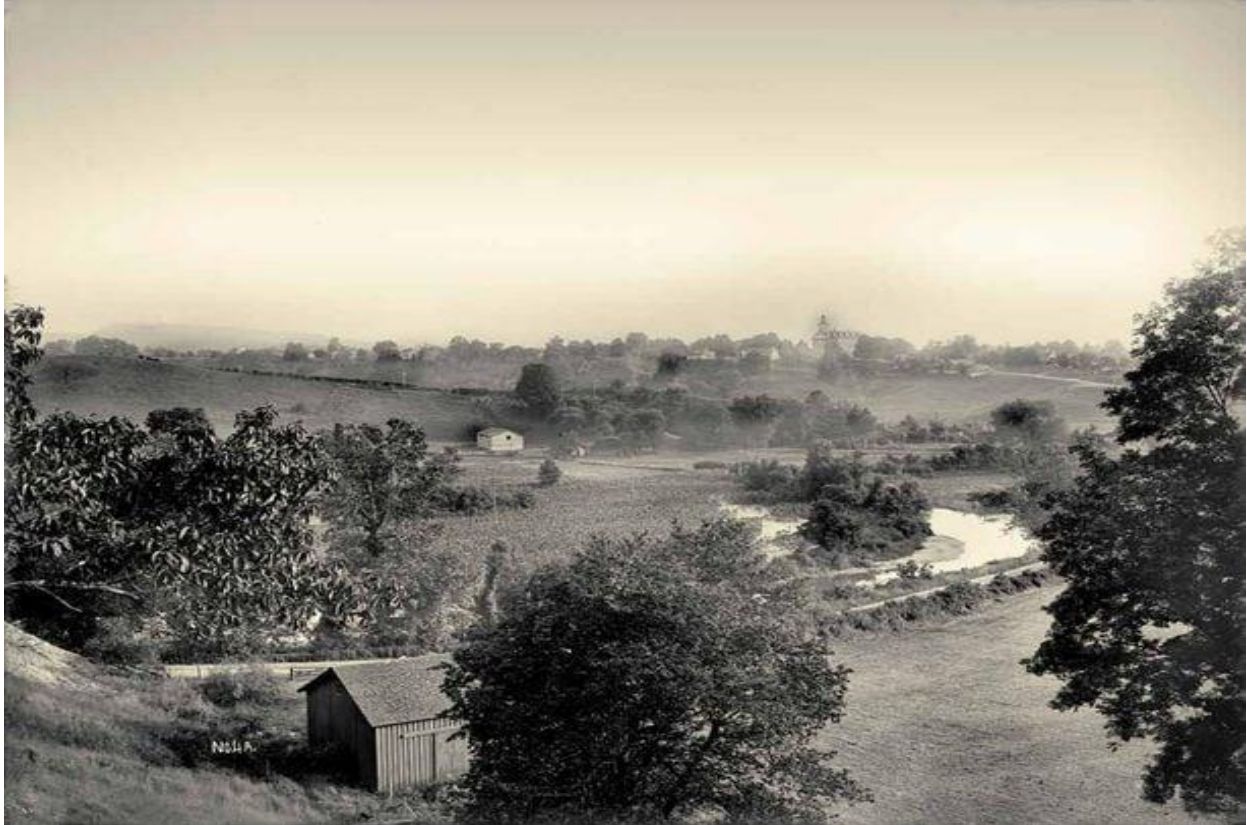
[WWW.LIONANDLAMBAPOLOGETICS.ORG](http://WWW.LIONANDLAMBAPOLOGETICS.ORG)

© 2024 LION AND LAMB APOLOGETICS — 1305 CHESTER STREET — CLEBURNE, TX 76033

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The faith also acquired a number of historical documents along with historic sites in Nauvoo, Ill., from the Independence, Mo.-based Community of Christ.

The two churches, both of which trace their roots back to Smith, [announced the agreement in a joint statement](#), noting that the Kirtland Temple closed Tuesday and will reopen March 25 to the public as a historic building.



(George Edward Anderson via The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) A view of Kirtland, Ohio, in 1907, with the temple in the background.

It will not be converted into a functioning Latter-day Saint temple. Once dedicated, such buildings are open only to faithful members.

Likewise, in Nauvoo, the Smith Family Homestead, the Mansion House and the Red Brick Store also closed Tuesday. They will reopen in 20 days for year-round free public tours.

This public access will last for at least 15 years, according to an FAQ about the purchase deal on the [Community of Christ website](#). “Beyond the contractual agreement,” it added, “we have received confirmation of the intention of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that they plan to continue to make these sites available to the public at no charge.”



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The property transfers do not include the Nauvoo cemetery where Smith and his brother Hyrum are buried.



(The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) The Mansion House in Nauvoo, Ill., the home of Joseph and Emma Smith in 1843.

The overall purchase price, according to [a fact sheet](#) released Tuesday, was \$192.5 million. It did not specify values for each property and item, but the expense would represent only a blip on the financial ledgers of the 17 million-member LDS Church, whose [total wealth has been estimated at \\$265 billion](#).

“We are deeply honored to assume the stewardship of these sacred places, documents and artifacts,” Russell M. Nelson, president of the Salt Lake City-headquartered faith, said in a [news release](#). “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.”

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'



(The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) The interior of the Kirtland Temple in Kirtland, Ohio.

## Which artifacts changed hands?

Among the documents and artifacts to trade hands are:

- The Bible used in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Good Book.
- Manuscripts of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible.
- Seven letters from Smith to his wife Emma.
- A history of the church written by early Latter-day Saint John Whitmer.
- The original David Rogers portraits of Joseph and Emma Smith.
- The cornerstone of the Nauvoo House, used to store the original Book of Mormon manuscript.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

- The original door of Missouri's Liberty Jail, where Joseph Smith and his colleagues were held captive.
- A document with the title of "Caractors," which may contain a sample of inscriptions from the gold plates Smith said he used to translate the faith's signature scripture, the Book of Mormon. (In 2017, the church bought the [printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon](#) from the Community of Christ for \$35 million — an amount [one historian deemed a bargain](#).)
- Joseph Smith's writing desk from the Kirtland Temple.
- Emma Smith's walking stick.
- The home of early Mormon leader Sidney Rigdon and wife Phebe.
- Other homes that belonged to early members.

The LDS Church said Tuesday it will continue to pursue development of a [new visitors center](#) near its Nauvoo Temple.

"Some of my best and dearest friends are with the [Community of Christ historic sites](#), and I am just heartbroken to see them move from Nauvoo," said Latter-day Saint historian Joseph Johnstun, who lives in Iowa, across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo. "I also have some very dear friends who work in the [LDS] Church History Department, and I have no fear but that the newly acquired sites will be extremely well maintained. They are some of the best people in the field for what they do."

Johnstun does worry, however, about the Community of Christ historian guides being replaced by Latter-day Saint missionaries.

"I don't think I will surprise anyone by saying that missionaries in Nauvoo have generally been a mixed bag," he said. "Some have been terrific. They've been personal friends, helped and encouraged me and my family, and done wonderful things to help the community of Nauvoo. Others have been less so."

As someone "entirely outside of both traditions," historian Laurie Maffly-Kipp said she can imagine "there is a lot of sadness mixed with relief that the buildings will be well cared for and open to the public."

The historian, who has just been appointed the Richard L. Bushman Chair of Mormon Studies at the University of Virginia, said it likely "feels like a deep loss for members of



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

the Community of Christ, and I can only hope that the LDS Church will understand that the transition is a really hard one for them.”

Like many Protestant mainline denominations, Maffly-Kipp said, “the Community of Christ is dealing with demographic realities that make it difficult to maintain historic buildings. In that sense, perhaps this will signal a closer working relationship between the denominations. One can only hope.”



(The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) Included in the stash of buildings, artifacts and documents the Utah-based church purchased from Community Christ are portraits of the faith's founder, Joseph Smith, and his wife Emma.

## Community of Christ's plans for the money

The agreement represents the culmination of nearly three years of discussions and will allow the Community of Christ, formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, to fund its missionary efforts around the globe.

“Through funding from increased endowments,” outgoing President Stephen M. Veazey said in [the release](#), “Community of Christ will have greater capacity to pursue our

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

mission priorities around the world, including continuing to fulfill the divinely envisioned purposes for our temple in Independence.”

[Stassi D. Cramm](#), who currently serves in the governing First Presidency, is [slated to replace Veazey](#) as leader of the 250,000-member faith starting in 2025. She will be the first woman to lead the Community of Christ.



(Community of Christ) Stassi D. Cramm has been called to serve as the first president-prophet of Community of Christ, formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

## The significance behind the Kirtland Temple

Dedicated by Joseph Smith in 1836, the Kirtland Temple served as an all-purpose house of worship for early church members, who gathered there for prayer, study and Sunday worship.

Latter-day Saints believe it was within its walls that, on April 3, 1836, Jesus appeared alongside the biblical Prophets Moses, Elijah and Elias to Smith and Oliver Cowdery, and, in addition to inaugurating the gathering of Israel, conferred on them the power necessary for “sealing” couples in marriage for eternity.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Historian [Richard Bushman](#), author of the acclaimed biography "[Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling](#)," applauded the sale while acknowledging the likely "mixed feelings" of some within the Community of Christ.

"It's been an icon of their faith — along with their temple in Independence — and connection to Joseph Smith for so long," he said. "But it's not like it's being turned into a bank. It will still be a historic Latter-day Saint building and open to the public."

He added that he believed his fellow Latter-day Saints will be good stewards of the sacred site.

"We will honor it and make it available," he said, adding that "it is one more indication of the kinship between our two traditions that we can share this beautiful and significant building."



(The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) Members of The Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square visit the Kirtland Temple in 1911.

David Howlett, a Community of Christ historian who wrote a book about [the Kirtland Temple](#), said the news had provoked "a lot of deep sadness for me personally."



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

The appearance of Jesus and the prophets is not part of his faith's tradition. By contrast, he said that for him and many others members of the Missouri-based faith, the building's importance is less historical and more personal.

"I know people who were married in the temple," he said, "We had youth trips there. The man who babysat me growing up, a 70-year-old man, he helped restore the Kirtland Temple. For people who gave parts of their lives to serve as tour guides there, generation after generation, it gave them pride in their tradition and prepared them to think critically about their history."

Christine Blythe — executive director of the [Mormon History Association](#), which plans to hold its annual summer conference in Kirtland in June — called the news "a major surprise."

"On one hand, I am assured that the historic sites will be well-preserved and stewarded by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," she said. "On the other hand, my heart goes out to Community of Christ. They should be lauded for their longtime commitment to these sites."

## Nauvoo and its history

[Latter-day Saint historian Benjamin Park](#), author of "[Kingdom of Nauvoo: The Rise and Fall of a Religious Empire on the American Frontier](#)," said that, in a lot of ways, it "made sense" that the Community of Christ served as the overseers of the final dwelling places of Joseph Smith and his family. After all, that is the faith that followed the founder's familial line after the schism in the wake of Smith's 1844 death.

"They were," he said, "the Smith family religion."

At the same time, Nauvoo and the properties involved in the agreement hold significant ties to [current Latter-day Saint beliefs and practices](#) not found in the Community of Christ.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics



(Val Brinkerhoff via The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) Smith Family Homestead in Nauvoo, Illinois.

For instance, the Red Brick Store represents the founding site of the Relief Society, the women's organization that has grown to include millions of Latter-day Saint women worldwide. It also is the place where Smith first introduced temple rituals found in the faith's temples today (albeit in modified form) and polygamy to many of its earliest participants.

Like Blythe, Park emphasized the pivotal role the Community of Christ has played in preserving the properties up to this point.

"It's hard to express how grateful we as Latter-day Saints should be to Community of Christ and the stewardship they have had over these properties," he said. "They have taken that calling seriously and, even when it was costly to do so, they did their best to maintain those properties."

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'



(The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) A reconstruction of the Red Brick Store in Nauvoo, Ill., owned by Joseph Smith.

Given this, he called on Latter-day Saints to view the transition with “gratitude, rather than victory.”

In 2012, the Community of Christ sold the Utah-based church several properties, including the [Hawn’s Mill Massacre site](#) in Missouri and the Joseph and Emma Smith home in Kirtland.

In a detailed [2022 financial update](#), the much-smaller and far-less-monied Community of Christ — which counts its revenues and expenditures in the millions rather than the billions — mentioned the “possible sale of historic assets” as a way to grow its endowments.

“The historic transfer underscores our long-standing effort to preserve religious and cultural heritage,” Tuesday’s joint release stated regarding the latest transaction, “and foster respective opportunities for growth and service to the world.”



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'



Tamarra Kemsley has been a reporter at *The Tribune* since 2021 but has been covering religion and politics since 2019. Her work has appeared in Religion News Service, the New York Post, and Religion & Politics. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from Brigham Young University and a master's in Islamic studies from Hebrew University.



Peggy Fletcher Stack is Senior Religion Writer for *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Hired in 1991 to cover Utah's various faiths, particularly Mormonism, Peggy has talked forgiveness with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, nearly fainted waiting for the Dalai Lama, fasted with Muslims during Ramadan — and has reported on 50 consecutive semiannual LDS General Conferences.

---

© *The Salt Lake Tribune*, March 5, 2024, updated March 6, 2024. Retrieved March 7, 2024.  
<https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2024/03/05/lds-church-buys-kirtland-temple/>

NOTE: This post is in compliance with the Fair Use clause of the US Copyright Act of 1976 (17 U.S. Code § 107). The US Supreme Court has issued several major decisions clarifying and reaffirming the fair use doctrine since the 1980s, most recently in the 2021 decision *Google LLC v. Oracle America, Inc.*