

ARTICLES

New temple for El Salvador

Grateful members regard news as a fulfillment of a long-awaited dream

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By **Chris Morales**

Church News staff writer

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador — A First Presidency statement was read during sacrament meetings throughout El Salvador on Nov. 18 announcing plans to construct a temple in that country of more than 96,000 members.

The statement commended Salvadorian members for their devotion and faithfulness in traveling long distances to receive their temple blessings.

"I've been a member for 25 years and we've been waiting for this day ever since I can remember," said President



The announcement of a new temple in San Salvador, El Salvador,

Manuel Ernesto Lopez of the San Salvador El Salvador Stake.

brings the number of operating or planned temples in the Central America Area to six. There are nearly 600,000 members residing in nearly 100 stakes.

The announcement is welcome news for members in El Salvador who not only cope with long-distance travel to the Guatemala temple, but have had to deal with a recent rise in highway robberies.

"This has always been a problem," said President Lopez, "but since May of this year it's become increasingly difficult to travel to Guatemala. There have been many delicate situations, but the sacrifice must be made and we're going nonetheless. With a prayer in our hearts, we go. We must go and perform those ordinances."

Despite the challenges, the San Salvador El Salvador Stake has increased in the number of members who regularly attend the temple.

"Three years ago we started with one bus of 60 people. Now it's three buses that go every two months. Next year, our goal is to take four buses every month.

"We constantly hear the news about the bad things that happen sometimes, but with faith, we leave with all three buses full. With Heavenly Father's grace, the members don't worry and we continue to go."

President Lopez said that after he read the statement, one of the longest-time members in that ward came up to him with tears in her eyes and said she had been asking the Lord every day for the privilege of seeing a temple in her native country. Now it would finally be realized, she said.

The next morning they spoke again and she asked, "Is this a dream?" He assured her it wasn't. "My dream has come true," she said.

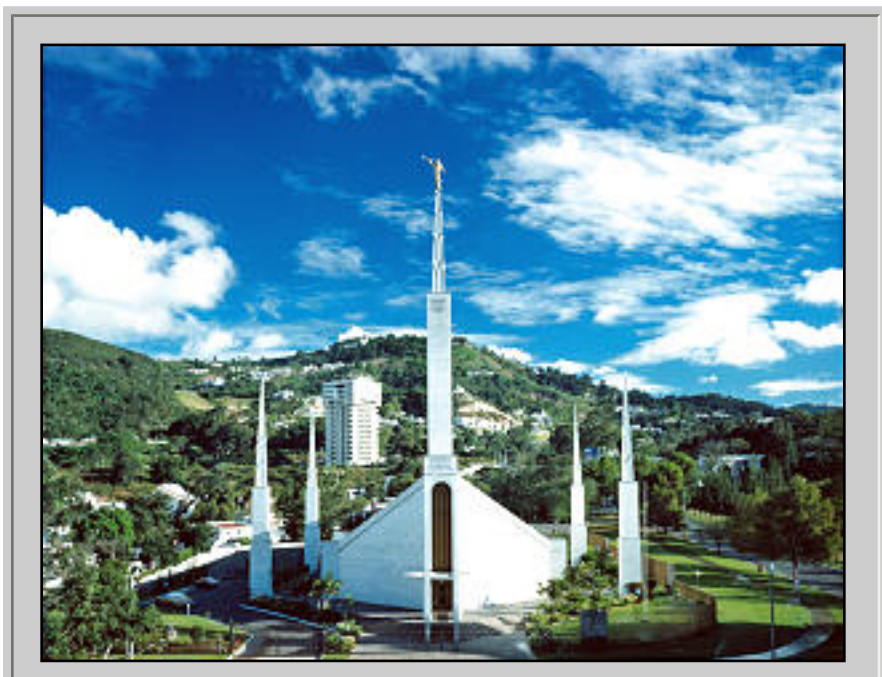
For members in the San Miguel El Salvador Stake, their typical temple excursion of 32-hour round-trips will be reduced to a more manageable six hours.

President Lopez said many of the sisters and older pioneers of the Church shed tears of joy. "I believe this is a unanimous feeling. We are all thinking, 'This is a dream.'"

The Central America Area of the Church includes seven counties that lie along the narrow neck of land with Mexico to the north and Colombia to the south.

The announcement of the San Salvador El Salvador Temple brings to six the number of temples either operating, announced or under construction in the Central America Area.

With the currently operating temples of Guatemala City



Guatemala Temple, dedicated in December 1984, and the San Jose Costa Rica Temple, dedicated in June 2000, a temple begun in 2005 is under construction in Panama City, Panama.

Since 1984, members in El Salvador have traveled to the temple in Guatemala. Trips that took some members 32 hours will soon be reduced to six hours.

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Two other temples have been announced and are awaiting groundbreaking. They are the Quetzaltenango Guatemala, the second temple in that country, and Tegucigalpa Honduras temples.

When completed, the six Central American temples will serve nearly 600,000 members residing in nearly 100 stakes, among 12 missions.

The gospel spread quickly throughout El Salvador after President Arwell L. Pierce of the Mexican Mission visited El Salvador and assigned missionaries in 1949. (Please see article on page 12.)

Ana Villasenor was the first to be baptized. Eleven others were baptized that day in March 1951. By 2002, membership reached 90,926.

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