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UAE: Dubai to welcome Middle East's first Mormon temple

By Shireena Al Nowais

UAE (06.04.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2VQmq9T> – The Middle East's first Mormon temple will be built in Dubai.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will have a place of worship on the legacy site of Expo 2020.

The church, which has 16 million members worldwide, will join

the UAE's rich diversity of religions and denominations. The decision was made public at its annual general conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, this weekend.

"The plan for a temple in Dubai comes in response to their gracious invitation, which we gratefully acknowledge," Russell Nelson, president of the church, said of the Emirati authorities.

The LDS Church, as it is known, has largely dropped the use of the term "Mormon", though its sacred text remains the Book of Mormon.

It claims a growing membership with more than 250,000 members worldwide baptised last year. Dubai and Shanghai are among the eight cities where new temples will be built.

"We are grateful to the leaders and people of the United Arab Emirates," said Elder Anthony D Perkins, president of the church's Middle East and North Africa operations.

"They have been kind, gracious and welcoming to us and to people of all faith traditions.

"The United Arab Emirates is a crossroads of commerce, education and innovation. The UAE resident population consists of more than 200 nationalities, where people of many different faiths worship, work and live together peacefully."

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints considers itself to be the restoration of the original church founded by Jesus Christ.

Adherents are “Latter-day Saints” or, less formally, “Mormons”.

There are 168 dedicated temples worldwide, though none in the Middle East. The church estimated there are five “wards” and more than 1,500 to 2,000 Mormons in the Emirates.

Members are encouraged to give 10 per cent of their annual income as tithes. That has given the church tens of billions of dollars in capital, which it uses for charitable interests.

The UAE Embassy in the United States described the decision as a “very important milestone”.

“This new house of worship will join the diverse gathering of other religions in the UAE, where we welcome multi-national congregations and have built houses of worship throughout our country,” a post on its Twitter account read.

Hend Al Otaiba, director of strategic communications at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, said the “UAE is proud to welcome the Latter-day Saints community to worship together with the future construction of

a temple in Dubai.

“The temple will be the Church’s first in Middle East, symbolising the spirit of interfaith tolerance and unity upon which the UAE was founded.”

Speaking to *The National* on Monday, members of the LDS Church in the UAE described their delight at the decision.

“In this part of the world there is so much respect for religion,” said Gary Roberts, 79, a political and financial adviser who previously worked with the administrations of former US presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton.

“For us to be given this kind of respect and the opportunity to practise is very heartwarming.”

Janet Roberts, 67, from Utah, said: “I’m positive that there will be a great deal of interest.

“We have lived in this country for 17 years and we are grateful for the vision of the late Sheikh Zayed.

“It is easier to talk about our beliefs in God here than even in our home countries. That is because of him,” said Ms Roberts, who works as an English content writer for Alef Education.

Last year, after Pope Francis's visit to the Gulf, the UAE announced the construction of the Abrahamic Family House.

It was named after the Prophet Abraham and will be built in recognition of the ties that bind Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

The three main buildings – a mosque, a church and a synagogue – will each lead to a central garden, under which will sit a museum and centre for education.

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