

THE THIRD STAKE PRESIDENCY

OCTOBER 1994 – OCTOBER 2003

October 9, 1994, Stake conference was presided over by Elder W. Don Ladd, a member of the second quorum of Seventy and counselor in the North East Area Presidency. Charles C. Stoddard was called and sustained as stake president with Charles J. Perry as first counselor and Dale L. Fegel as second counselor.

The initial training by Elder Ladd and the follow up sessions with Elder Barry Mayo, our area authority, emphasized the importance of sharing the gospel to increase membership, and to increase the number of Melchizedek Priesthood holders in our stake, with the focus on loving the Saints.

Soon after, in a stake presidency meeting, verse 18 in the 29th chapter of Proverbs was shared, “where there is no vision, the people perish”. It was decided that the “vision” for the stake would be to grow in membership to the point where the stake could be divided. The adage from President Goodwin came to mind, “In the Church we multiply by dividing”. The stake membership at that time was 3300. 4000 was needed to divide.

It was also decided to take advantage of our stake's close proximity to three of the Church's historical sites, Palmyra, New York, Kirtland, Ohio and Nauvoo, Illinois. Youth conference would be held on a rotating basis at each of these places, with a fourth conference here at home. That way insuring all of our youth the opportunity to visit the “Sacred Grove”, the temple where prophets of old returned and Priesthood Keys were restored, and the place of martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum.

Retreats for bishops/branch presidents and their wives would continue to be held annually. This was done with three purposes in mind; to provide a “break” away from their wards and branches at a modest price, to provide specialized instruction, and most importantly, for the stake presidency to personally thank the wives for all the support they give their husbands.

During the period of October 1994 to 2003 the Grand Rapids Stake experienced many wonderful events which blessed the lives of its individual members and at times non-members as well. There were visits by General Authorities, Area Authorities, Mission presidents and Temple presidents for stake conferences. Three Temple dedications, Palmyra, Nauvoo and Winters Quarters, were participated in by satellite broadcast. There were annual ward/branch conferences. These were most often followed with delicious luncheons, probably being remembered longer than the spoken words, giving stake leaders and their ward counterparts time to visit on a more personal basis, thus building and renewing friendships. The love and concern

for the youth of the stake required great emphasis on our girls' camps, scout camps, youth conferences, standards nights and other youth activities.

Who can forget "Mormon golf" at the Merrill Michigan welfare farm where once the half mile long row of beets were eradicated of weeds and a big luncheon was served? It was a great experience to be gathered with the "saints" and to labor in the "vineyard" together. Probably the only time this closeness amongst the members was surpassed was when the Stake Temple days were held.

1995: March; at stake conference Richard Blackmer was sustained as patriarch of our stake. Kenneth Simons, after pronouncing over two thousand patriarchal blessings over the years was given emeritus status. President and Sister Barton of the Chicago Temple were our guest speakers for conference. Twin Gables in Saugatuck hosted our bishops' retreat. In April the Greenville Ward, then meeting in an old building in Belding, moved to their new chapel in Greenville which was then dedicated on November 19. The chapel was built on land that used to be part of the ward asparagus farm. In June, youth conference was held at Kirtland, Ohio, with Karl Ricks Anderson, an expert on church history in Kirtland and author of "Josephs Smith's Kirtland," speaking at our fireside. In September, at the General Relief Society meeting in Salt Lake City, President Hinckley announced the "Proclamation to the World". In October, Elder Marlin K. Jensen, of the Seventy, presided at our stake conference. On November 5, the Muskegon ward comprising of over 800 members was divided creating two wards, Muskegon and North Muskegon.

1996: February 7, the stake presidency met with the bishops of the Grand Rapids and Grand Valley wards and initiated "Project Zarahemla." This was the task of dividing the two wards in order to make a third ward, and re-establish the Wyoming Ward that was dissolved years ago. March 22, Bishops retreat was held at the Chicago Temple with President Barton. May 5, a special Sacrament meeting was held at the stake center for the Grand Valley, Grand Rapids and Greenville Wards and the Grand River Branch with seven hundred attending. New boundaries and bishops were sustained. Bishop Danny Stevens from Grand Rapids to the Wyoming Ward, Bishop Kurt Lybbert from the Greenville to the Grand Rapids Ward, David Rowell the new bishop of the Greenville Ward and Mel Anderson stayed with the Grand Valley Ward. June, Detroit and Lansing Bi-Regional Conference with President James E. Faust and Elder Boyd K. Packer was held at the Lansing Stake Center on Saturday and in the MSU Breslin Center on Sunday. Nauvoo was the site of youth conference. July scout camp and girls camp were held. On September 22, 1996 for the first time the Sunday Session of Stake conference was held at two locations. The morning session at the stake center was held for the Hastings, Greenville, Grand Rapids, Grand Valley, Grand River and Wyoming units. The afternoon session held at the Muskegon Chapel was for the Big Rapids, Hart, Holland, Ludington, Muskegon and North Muskegon units. Due to the fact we had visiting General Authorities in June, there was no general Authority at our stake conference in September.

1997: March; For stake conference we had Brother and Sister Bruce Clark, area family history advisors, as our special guests and speakers. April; The bishops' retreat was in Saugatuck with Darrel Thomas addressing us. The Youth Conference was a hand cart challenge at Camp Gerber in June which had to be ended early due to high winds and rain storms. July 6, The Wyoming Ward started meeting in their own chapel. August; senior missionaries, Brother and Sister Willie were here to help organize our "Spanish Group" that met with the Grand Valley Ward with twenty five present.. Stake Girls' Camp at Owasippee and a multi stake boy scout camp at D Bar A; September; A "Blitz" was held in the Hart Branch with eight High Councilmen and the stake presidency. The purpose was an effort to visit and encourage the less active to return to church. September 20 & 21 Elder Earl Tingey of the Seventy was our visiting General Authority for Stake Conference. The Sunday 10:00AM session was held in Muskegon and the 2:00PM session in Grand Rapids. September 28, The Wyoming Chapel was dedicated. October; 18, was stake education day. The year ended with a Stake New Year's Eve Dance, 12/31/97.

1998: January; The decision was made that ward and branch conferences would be attended by the all members of the stake presidency and all members of auxiliary presidencies. March 14 & 15; Stake Conference was blessed. President and Sister Goodwin from the Chicago Temple, our first stake president, were our guest speakers. The Sunday A.M. session in Grand Rapids had 691 in attendance and the afternoon session in Muskegon had 405. May; The Fremont Branch was reestablished with Harry Schriver as branch president. July; Youth conference was held at the Hill Cumorah Pageant in Palmyra, New York. 161 youth were able to attend, thanks to twenty chaperones; nine stake youth leaders, four buses and one van. August; It was the month for beet hoeing at the Merrill Farm and Girls' Camp at Owasippee. October; 10&11, Elder David Sorenson of the Seventy was our visiting General Authority. 403 attended the A.M session in Muskegon and 691 the P.M. session in Grand Rapids. Stake membership was now at 3992 members. November 14, was the day our stake combined with the Traverse City District and had 250 plus members attended Chicago Temple for Stake Temple Day. Both, stake and district, provided the necessary temple workers and patrons.

1999: The March sessions of our stake conference were blessed with Brother and Sister Beckstrand, Family History specialists. Total attendance for the two Sunday sessions was 1125. April; The Twin Gables in Saugatuck hosted the bishops' retreat with President and Sister Goodwin from the Chicago Temple our featured guests. June; Youth Conference was a "Wilderness Experience" at Camp Owasippee. No one will forget the blue tarps and "honey pots" provided by Brother Al Geisler, or how far you can walk on so little food. October 9-19 were the dates for the Detroit Temple open house. The Temple dedication was held on the 24th by our prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. Cyrus J. Webber and his wife Glenna were called as president and matron of the temple. On October 30-31, Elder Craig Zwick of the Seventy presided at our stake conference with two Sunday sessions.

2000 (Y2K) April 6, Satellite broadcast of the Palmyra Temple Dedication; 7-8 Bishops' retreat in Saugatuck, President and Sister Webber from the Detroit Temple and Brother and Sister Scott

Henderson from LDS Family Services were our special guests. May 6, Regional Conference was held in Lansing with President Boyd K. Packer and Elder Zwick. The Sunday session was broadcast via satellite to our stake center. June; Youth conference was held at Alma College and included traveling to Mt. Pleasant to celebrate President Hinckleys' 90th birthday via satellite. July; Girls' camp at Eagle Village with the "overnighter" for the fourth year girls being a canoe trip down the Muskegon River. Scout camp was at Camp Gerber. October 28-29, Stake Conference with President and Sister Webber, Detroit Temple President as special guests.

2001; March: Stake conference with special guests, Gary and Denise Rayner, North East Area family history advisors from Burlington, Ontario, Canada. 482 attended the Muskegon session on Sunday and over 600 at the session in Grand Rapids. April 20 & 21 was our bishops' retreat at Saugatuck. Elder Lyndon Robison, Lansing Stake President and his wife Sister Bonnie Robison were our special guests. April 22 Winter Quarters Temple dedication was broadcast via satellite. May; membership of the stake at 4,399. June; Youth Conference at Kirtland, Ohio. Brother Karl Anderson addressed our youth. Our youth got to see and experience the historical/spiritual sites of Kirtland and perform service at the stake welfare farm. They harvested over 1,500 lbs. of strawberries. July; Girls' camp the week of the 16th at Yankee Springs camp ground. July 23-28 was the Michigan LDS Boy Scout Encampment at Northwoods. August; The Grand Rapids, Michigan stake was responsible for the entire farm operation at the Merrill Welfare Farm on Aug. 4. Aug. 12, The members of the Hart. Muskegon and North Muskegon units met to sustain boundary changes and changing Muskegon Ward to the Spring Lake Ward. September; Moses Israde was called to serve as President of the Spanish Branch. October; 27&28 Elder Spencer L. Condie 2nd Counselor Area Presidency presided at all sessions in Grand Rapids and Muskegon.

2002: March 9&10; Stake Conference with President and Sister Goodwin as special guests. The Sunday A.M. Session in Muskegon and the P.M. Session in Grand Rapids. April 19&20; Bishops' retreat was held at the Double JJ Ranch in Rothbury. Dr. Jack Phieffer, president of the Bloomfield Hills Stake, was our featured guest. June; 20-22, Youth Conference at the Kettunen Center combined with a service project, beautifying the town park, for the Village of Tustin. 27; The Nauvoo Temple dedication via satellite. July 15-20 Girls' Camp at Yankee Springs, 22-27 Scout Camp at Camp Gerber. August 10, Merrill Welfare Farm Day. October; 20; The Hastings Branch became the Hastings Ward. October 26&27 Stake conference with visiting Area Authority, Lawrence R. Fuller from Brampton, Ontario. Sunday A.M. Session in Muskegon, P.M. Session in Grand Rapids. Stake membership at that time was 4500.

2003: March 8 & 9, Stake Conference, Michigan Lansing Mission President Scott Gardner and Sister Paula Gardner, and Detroit Temple President Webber and Sister Webber were special guests. On March 26 there was a special fireside with Elder Craig Christensen of the Seventy presiding. April; 11 & 12 the Bishops' Retreat was held at Lakeside Inn in Whitehall. Featured guests were Brother and Sister Cal Clegg. 13th, A special fireside for all Primary workers was held with Gayle Clegg, Second Counselor in the General Primary Presidency. June; 16-21 Girls'

Camp at Owasippee, 25th Mormon Tabernacle Choir at the VanAndel Arena, 26-28 Youth Conference with 138 of our youth at Nauvoo, Illinois. July 28-Aug. 2 Scout Camp at Camp Gerber. Sept; 23, Fireside with Elder Glenn L. Pace of the Seventy. October; 25-26 Sundays' session of Stake Conference was held at the East Kentwood High School in order to accommodate the number of members anticipated to attend. Elder H. Bryan Richards of the Area Presidency presided with Elder Kim Smith, Area Authority. At that time the current stake presidency was released and a new stake presidency was called and sustained.

Several spiritual and unforgettable events blessed the members of our stake during these nine years. In November 1998, President Glenn Goodwin, the first stake president of the Grand Rapids Stake, was then President of the Chicago Temple. He invited our Stake to have a Stake Temple Day on November 14; as a result, 1208 ordinances were performed that Saturday. Starting at 3:00 P.M. and until late into the evening, members of the Grand Rapids Stake staffed the Temple. After 3:00 P.M. 423 ordinances were accomplished. Over 300 members of the Stake attended of which 60 were ordinance workers.

On Sunday, October 24, 1999, President Gordon B. Hinckley dedicated the Detroit Temple. President Charles Stoddard reflects that he never thought that a temple would be built in Michigan in his lifetime. Being born and raised in Lansing, when he was growing up, the closest Temple to Michigan was the Salt Lake Temple. In November 1974, the Washington D.C. Temple was opened. Stake members would travel twelve hours by bus or car to attend that temple. In August 1995, the Chicago Temple was opened, making it only a four to five hour drive for most Stake members. Now it is a blessing to have the Detroit Temple be less than a three hour drive for most Stake members. Will there ever be a second Temple in Michigan? Grand Rapids would be a Grand location!

Our Youth Conference in June 2003 will never be forgotten by those that were blessed to be there. One Hundred Thirty Eight stake youth plus their adult leaders traveled to Nauvoo for a two day conference. They toured the historical sites in Nauvoo and Carthage. They also attended a fireside by Glenn Goodwin who was then a Nauvoo Temple ordinance worker. Then there was the visit of James Hendricks, a.k.a. Bishop Stan Brown, sharing his story of being shot in the Battle of Crooked River and later walking to the "valley". The highlight of the conference was the performance of youth baptisms in the Temple. Seeing a hundred youth dressed in white sitting reverently in the Nauvoo Temple brought tears to the eyes of the Stake Presidency in attendance.

Who would ever think that the Mormon Tabernacle Choir would come to Grand Rapids, Michigan? Not many, if any, but on June 25, 2003 that is just what happened thanks to a few miracles. It started with the crazy idea of President Charles Stoddard to invite the Choir to "the center of Zion". He contacted Mac Christensen, president of the Choir, about stopping in Grand Rapids en route to Boston. The Choir had been invited to sing with the Boston Pops in a Fourth of July concert. President Stoddard was told that President Hinckley would have to approve the

concert in Grand Rapids. Fortunately, that was not a problem. President Hinckley was very familiar with Grand Rapids. He and his wife, Marjorie, had visited Grand Rapids several times when their son Clark was Bishop of the Grand Rapids Ward in the 1980s.

Once the concert was approved, the next challenge was securing a venue. The 2,500 seat DeVos Hall, home of the Grand Rapids Symphony and Opera was the logical place. President Christensen and his staff flew to Grand Rapids to investigate the site. This included checking the acoustics, lighting, staging, etc. of the Hall and the facilities to lodge 360 Choir members plus staff, some spouses and the Orchestra at Temple Square. After DeVos Hall and the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel had met approval, a surprise came. It was unexpectedly decided to close the DeVos Hall for the summer due to the construction of the DeVos Convention Center next door.

To accommodate the 2,500 seat minimum required by the Choir, three mega-churches with large sanctuaries were contacted. Sadly, all three rejected our request because they did not want Mormons using their churches. They wrongly believed that Mormons were not Christians. Then a miracle; John Logie, Mayor of Grand Rapids, offered the VanAndel Arena as a substitute for the DeVos Hall. Not only did VanAndel Arena have more than three times as many seats as DeVos Hall, it would cost the same as DeVos Hall, normally it was much more expensive. This allowed more people to attend at a lower ticket price and still cover the expenses.

The change in venue required another trip by the Choirs' staff to check out the technical aspects of the Van Andel Arena. It passed, except for one thing. There had to be a sixty foot shell on the stage behind the Choir. A suitable shell was not available anywhere in West Michigan. Then, another small miracle. David Rogers, president of the Midland, Michigan Stake, offered exactly what was needed. His company, Stage Right, had built such a shell for the 21,000 seat Conference Center in Salt Lake City. His company not only provided the shell but they transported it to and from Grand Rapids with the set up and tear down at no cost.

When the Choir arrived in eleven buses at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, Jeff Lewis, Bishop of the Grand Rapids Ward, led a small choir of stake members to welcome them. The local choir held up a banner saying "Welcome to the Center of Zion" and sang the hymn "Beautiful Zion". This special welcome brought tears to the eyes of many on the Mormon Tabernacle Choir members. What we didn't know was that this was the first time anyone had ever sung to them.

It was no less than a miracle that over 8,600 people, not 2,500, were at the concert to hear The Mormon Tabernacle Choir perform. Most had never heard them in person before. The Choir received a well deserved long, long standing ovation as the audience did not want them to stop singing. The headline in the Grand Rapids Press the following day summed it up in one word, "Awesome!"

Someone once said, "Goals are like the stars, they may not be reached, but they can serve as a guide". The goal to divide that Stake was not reached even though membership was now over 4,500. By 2003 the number of members necessary to divide the stake had been increased to

5,000. Still in the effort to grow and divide many of the members and their families had been blessed. In large part this is mostly due to the hard work and devotion of the members of our stake. Without a doubt members were blessed by the faithful service of the stake clerks, executive secretaries, and auxiliary presidents.

Relief society: Judy Emery, Pam Wadsworth, Sandy Kempf

Young Women: Linda Perry, Cindy Steorts, Sheila Heidel, Vicki Fredline

Primary: Darlene Fegel, Sherry Cox, Judy Stovall, Jane Gould

Young Men: James Carey, David Sugiyama, Jim Fritz

Stake Clerk: Mel Northup

Stake Executive Secretaries: