



# Pulse of the Congregation

February, 2016

## Exciting Changes, the Saints Move Forward in Salem

*by Brother Brian Herren*

*Model of new church building*



Dear Saints,

It's time to move forward. As many of you know, the building that we have been meeting in for the past 18 years has been sold to another church group, and we will not have use of the building after March. Our final service in the building will be on Easter. This opens an exciting new period and opportunity for the Church in Salem. The day may come when we look back upon the sale of this building as one very defining moment in our moving forward with the church building project already underway. We may view this change as something which motivated us to make the final push, to

step out in faith, and to pursue that which otherwise might have been procrastinated. It may have been a difficult matter to leave the comforts of a relatively inexpensive and convenient place of worship to pursue a plan less well known, and one that will undoubtedly require great sacrifice. However, we see that amongst God's people, He has always opened the right doors at the right times, and just as importantly, closed the doors that needed to be closed at the right time. We pray for His will. We pray that He spare us from the ease and pleasure that would otherwise find us complacent.

The plans for the new church building have been revisited with the architect, and have been revised to represent a more humble and simple place of worship. The new plans were disseminated at a church meeting following services on February 8 in Salem, and are available upon request to any individual. With the changes made in the plans, the estimated cost of building the new church has plummeted to less than half of the original estimate, making the project achievable if we press forward with full purpose of heart.

To discover whether financing a portion of the building costs was an acceptable option for us, Brothers Gary Livingston and Jim Clark petitioned lending institutions of different types. The results of their inquiry was informative, and at least three pieces of valuable information were realized: (1) there was no lending institution amongst the several petitioned that showed any willingness to finance a small church (2) a lending institution was not interested in building a structure one part at a time, but would only lend toward a fully complete building (3) if a lending institution financed the building of the church, their requirements would include strict oversight of the contractors and subcontractors utilized, making it next to impossible for any of the Saints to actually swing a hammer or lay a shingle. Hiring a professional for every single element of construction would mean that the building cost would likely approach that estimated by the architect: \$498,245 for the building and \$84,440 for on-site improvements. These figures assume that all work is hired, without making use of any of the many generous offers already being made by Saints qualified to assist in the building of the church without pay. While these costs are achievable, they would be further reduced if the Saints were able to enter the work force where qualified. Financing the whole building was not going to work as we had hoped because of these three reasons.

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### Upcoming Events:

- March 18-20: Spring Preaching Series
- March 26: Jeff and Christy's Wedding
- March 27: Sunrise Worship for YAG
- April 15-17: Spring Youth Retreat
- April 22-24: Women's Retreat
- April 29-30: HS Seniors climb Mt. St. Helens

## Exciting Changes, the Saints Move Forward in Salem

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As the Lord closed some doors, those He had opened became more obvious. By avoiding the process of financing the church building, and using cash as much as possible, the congregation would minimize unnecessary debt. Furthermore, in bypassing banks and lending institutions, the church building could be constructed one part at a time, and it could be built without the undue burdens required by the banks. This means that the congregation could save enough to simply erect four walls and a roof, provide basic plumbing, and begin meeting in the building before it was finished with all of the finer details of the interior. The first stage may yield a simple, watertight structure without all the frills and finishing that might be added in time as funds were raised in a stepwise process. This would dramatically reduce the amount of working capital needed before we could break ground. Additionally, by avoiding a bank loan, the Saints would be able to contribute to the building process themselves by volunteering their time and effort, further driving down the costs. We can do this.

Now is the time for us to buckle down, sacrifice, give of ourselves in ways that we have never given before. We plan to meet in the homes of the Saints for two to three years and save every penny that we can. By not spending money on rent, or paying someone else's mortgage, we contribute to the cause in savings. The congregation has been blessed with homes big enough to provide for our worship, and hearts generous enough to offer them. The next two to three years will not be easy, or comfortable, or free of challenges to our faith. They will be character building, and people building, the means by which God proves His children. It will be best if those who are physically able to park at a distance and walk will voluntarily do so, leaving the closest parking spots available for the older and infirm. It will be best for those young and flexible to give way to those who might find a particular seat or seating arrangement more tolerable. I know that there are some who would be willing to be seated on the floor, pressed into a closet, or standing in a corner, but I also know that this is not what we want for those who may be a little older, infirm, or suffer from aches and pains. While we all move forward together, let us all look after our brothers and sisters and not require any more of any man or woman than that which is necessary.

Now is a time for us to contribute to the building fund in a focused and deliberate manner, doing all that we can to prosper the work before us. Checks intended for the building fund should be clearly marked "building fund" in the memo, and cash intended for the building fund should be placed in an envelope marked "building fund". If one can earn extra here, or give extra there, let us spare nothing in our effort and give all we can in this great push. It's time to move forward.

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## Vancouver Branch Invites All to Attend Preaching Series

*by Brother Mike Terry*



We are excited to announce a Spring Preaching Series and invite you to come and hear our Brother Elder Kreg Levengood, and welcome him back to the Northwest. Kreg and his wife Tracey, along with their four children – Julia, Andrea, Zach and Emma – attended the Vancouver branch and were in the Northwest from 2004 – 2005. The weekend of March 18 – 20, 2016 Kreg will be preaching a spring series at the Vancouver Restoration Branch. Brother Kreg is an elder who attends the South Chrysler Branch with his family in Independence, MO. An engineer by trade, Kreg graduated as a petroleum engineer from Marietta College in Ohio, where he grew up before gathering to Independence.

The series will begin Friday at 7 pm and speaking will continue on Saturday at 7 pm and Sunday morning at 11 am – all at the Vancouver Restoration Branch.

Dear Saints! We will again be having an Easter Choir this Spring, to glorify our Savior's resurrection and use our voices in honoring his wondrous name! We will practice at the church building at 8:45 on Sunday mornings starting February 28th. I hope all who are able, will come and join us in singing and preparing a ministry for our Master and King!

Notice: if there are any who would be interested in storing / using the piano or organ from the church building in their home, or have a good place to safely keep it, please notify Brother Brian as soon as possible.

## Exciting Changes, the Saints Move Forward in Salem

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As we give of ourselves, we might consider how much of ourselves we are truly giving: in time, energy, money, effort, support, countenance, teaching, preaching, service, earning, giving, etc. When we give a small amount of ourselves, we put the works of God into competition with each other for the small percentage we have given. This is not the stewardship into which we are called. Instead of putting God's works into competition with one another for our small percentage, we must put the works of God into direct competition with the sumptuous elements of our living until our offerings are increased and all of God's works are fulfilled in His church. For example, the Church will not decide between "oblation" and "building a house of worship and prayer", asking them to compete with one another for the limited resources we give while we retain the greater portion for ourselves. No, all of God's works should combine to compete with our decadence, until the Church does all that she is called to do and does it all very well. God's work never undermines God's work. However, the opportunities before us may square God's work against our own ideas of self, comfort, private savings, and personal gratification. Today is a day of sacrifice, and all are invited.

As we employ ourselves in earnest response to the opportunity before us, let us also reach out to our brethren and sisters the world around. Let us petition the powers that be, the friends of the Church, and all those whose interest in this great work might be a motive for their assistance.

Finally, let us remember the words of a pioneer missionary who served in China, Mr. Hudson Taylor. He said: *"There are three stages in every great work of God: first, it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done."*

It is true that the Saints in Salem may choose to withdraw at any one of these stages, but it is equally true that with God's hand we can persevere right through them all. Always, the choice is ours, and always the power within us. The outcome of our efforts will depend heavily upon the hearts with which we enter into them. Let them not fail us now, and may God continue to add His blessings for His glory and honor forever.

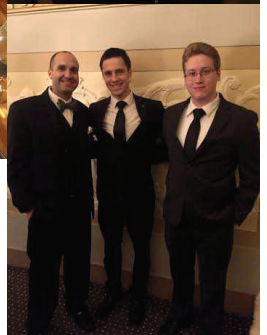
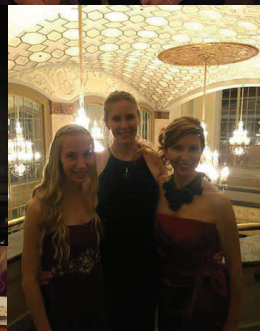
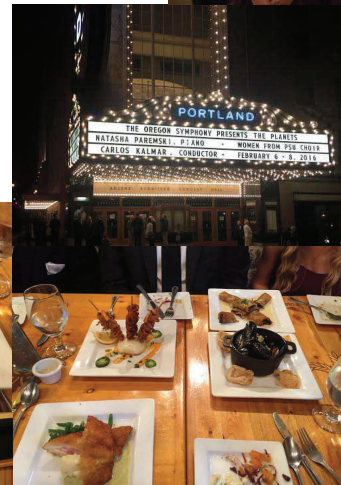
### Senior Night Surprise

by Brother Michael Livingston

A couple days before the senior night all of the seniors received a fancy letter. The letter started out with, "Bonjour les amis," which means "hello friends" in French, and it went on to say that something big had been planned for us that evening. The letter had a couple rules at the end which stated, "1) You must be ready for new adventure. 2) You ought to be in your finest attire as this will be a white tie affair..." The letter then ends with, "Merci beaucoup" which means "thank you very much".

Then, February 6th arrived. We all got dressed in our finest clothing, and went off to Portland to find what was waiting for us there. We first arrived at a beautiful French restaurant. The food there was fantastic, but our night didn't end there. We then went to downtown Portland where we were able to see a symphony, which was amazing. They played Fireworks, by Stravinsky, Four Parables, by Schoenfield, and The Planets, by Gustav Holst.

Even though our time there had to end, we will always remember that night.



*Bon  
Appétit*

## Just Keep Sowing

*by Brother Brian Herren*

The prophets told men of old that in the last days, God would do a great work upon the earth and send forth His gospel unto the ends of the earth, to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Today is a very exciting time to be alive, as a great many prophecies are being fulfilled around us, and we are included in their fulfillment to the degree that we faithfully step forward into the gospel work. It is not the wisdom of men, their best laid plan, or a passing fad that finds God's work being promulgated around the world as it never has before. It is the very hand of God in fulfilling His promise, satisfying every prophetic word, and bringing to fruition the

many scriptures foretelling such a time as this. One of the ways that God's word has extended to the uttermost reaches of the earth is through ministry made available on websites like those maintained by the Restoration Branches. People around the world are downloading sermons, hearing things they had never before known, studying articles, considering the ways of the

Lord in new light and coming to a knowledge of God's one true and living church. Many times, ministry in this way plants a seed and opens the door for more personal missionary efforts to be employed at a later time. There is no end to God's work, nor any limit to the means He uses in reclaiming the lives of men from their lost and fallen state. While the advent of technology rightly used has been one means whereby God is now fulfilling His promises to the ends of the earth, it has also been the source of many blessings domestically. Many emails are received from those seeking truth right here in the United States, and many emails are sent in return to answer questions, encourage study, and open eyes to the true gospel. Oftentimes tracts, Restoration books, and even scriptures are mailed. Last year, I began a correspondence with a man in Los Angeles who found the Church by way of the Salem branch's website.



The correspondence has continued to this very day, and he is now hungering and thirsting for more. In fact, Brother Gary Livingston and I plan to make a trip to Los Angeles, April 8-10, to become better acquainted with the family in fellowship, teach pre-baptismal classes to his three children, and foster the work of the Lord in their home as far as the Spirit directs us. No one can say what might become of any seed that may be planted along the way. Surely many will fall by the wayside, and many will be stolen away by the fowls. This is not to discourage us. It is our job to sow. Some seeds will begin to grow only to be choked out and fail. Still, against all

odds, and against the very efforts of our adversary, some of those seeds planted will prevail and the fruit will glorify God in His kingdom eternally. We may not know the outcome of any planted seed, and we must not be discouraged in our sowing by those that have seemed to fail. Our work is the work of the sower. We must keep sowing, sowing, sowing...water where we

might, nourish those we find by the way, and leave the increase to the Lord. Let us not grow weary, cynical, unfaithful, or jaded. If we see our efforts fail a million times, it will seem a small disappointment when compared to the joy known in bringing forth even one pleasing piece of fruit in the kingdom of our loving Father. It will be for His glory forever, and great will be His pleasure if we have labored all of our lives to bring but one soul before Him. Now is the day to labor. Just keep sowing, pressing onward, pushing forward, making every interaction the witness of Christ, with a countenance of light, and the promise of hope. Let us not give up or give too great a place to the discouraging words of our enemies. Surely the Lord will see to it that every scripture is fulfilled. What a joy and pleasure we will find if we can but serve as the smallest part of His great and everlasting work. There is work for us to do right here, and right now, and every soul is summoned to the army of the Lord.

## Next Adult Sunday School Class

*by Brother Gary Livingston*

Over the last year Elder Brian Herren has been teaching our adult Sunday school class on the parables of Jesus Christ. It has been a rich study as we have been searching the principles of the gospel that Jesus taught through the use of parables and how they apply to our own lives. As this study is coming to a close, Brother Brian asked if I would be willing to teach our next adult class. I made it a matter of prayer and my mind was quickly directed to the early Christian church. As we have spent much time learning the teachings of Jesus, it felt right that we continue our study with how His apostles went forth after Christ's crucifixion and continued on with their ministry as the church began to develop. Our main text will be the Book of Acts while our supporting texts will be other scriptures from our three standard books. My prayer is that the Lord will go before us in this study and that we might continue to grow as a church and as God's people.

*Sister Melissa Herren*



## Book of Mormon Land Testimonies

*by Sister Melissa Herren*

In touring the Book of Mormon Lands there were many sites that moved and impressed me, but there were a couple that really stood out. The site of Yaxchilan was one of them. We journeyed to the site via outrigger boats mid-morning on the river Sidon (known today as the Usumacinta River). After disembarking, we climbed stairs and walked through the jungle until we came to a structure that is referred to as the Labyrinth. We entered the structure and wound our way through the passages until we found the exit and were greeted by an expansive site full of lush green grass, tall trees and impressive ruins that are cradled by a dense rain forest jungle. As we explored the site and were shown the highlights, my eyes were continually drawn to the beauty and stillness of the whole site and I felt many times a spirit of peace. About half-

way through our tour we gathered together on one of the structures. We took time for prayer, but before that we had a moment of silence. During that silence, I again felt that spirit of peace and was impressed upon that the Lord's people had dwelled in that place long ago. My heart was overjoyed to have this blessing from the Lord. I will forever remember Yaxchilan for its beauty and peace, but mainly for the testimony that was given to me by my Heavenly Father.

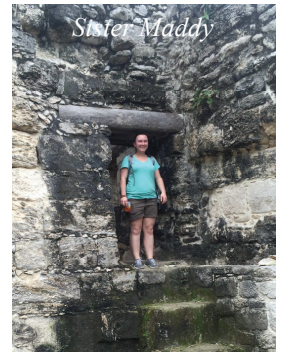
Another site that meant a lot to me was Kohunlich. At this site I was able to put a picture to the Book of Mormon. We explored ruins of residential areas, where I was able to visualize day-to-day life, cooking, sleeping, and working. We climbed a large structure called the Acropolis that had a spectacular view of the site and surrounding jungle. After climbing down from the Acropolis and passing by its steep, straight side while walking through the site's main plaza, we could imagine how King Benjamin might have given his famous sermon. Later a few of us explored more residential areas in a less visited area which eventually led us to one of the surrounding sacbes (raised, paved road built by the Maya). We followed the sacbe back to a trail which led us back to our group. Seeing the sacbes and walking on them gave me a glimpse into how the people in the Book of Mormon may have traveled from city to city, or even within their own city. After rejoining our group we paused for a moment of praise where we sang The Old, Old Path. Singing this song fed my spirit. I felt that the Lord had inspired Sister Sherrie to suggest this song. It seemed so fitting to me after walking along the ancient sacbe and being able to see in our minds how our brothers and sisters of the Book of Mormon may have lived and worshipped so long ago. I was blessed by this moment in time, so thankful to have seen what we had seen and to raise my voice in song to our Lord and Savior.



**“And it shall be as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust...” - II Nephi2:39**

## Testimonies in Mesoamerica

by Sister Maddy Brost-Turner



On our trip to Mesoamerica this past December, we were so blessed; blessed beyond the means of safe passage from the United States to the Yucatan, beyond safe travels between sites, beyond plentiful food and safe drinking water. There is something great and comforting about journeying with so many.

I think, perhaps, I had expected some great miracle; to see something in the flesh that would make my faith unshakable. I had prayed long and hard for my own Book of Mormon testimony for months before we were to leave on the trip. However, it wasn't until the trip was nearly half-way over that I realized I *had* received my testimony. It had come in so many ways and so many forms that I hadn't been able to recognize it until I had taken a step back and looked at the larger picture.

My testimony comes to me in the sight of red handprints on the Temple of the Frescoes in Tulum, at the vast expanse of jungle we saw at Dzibanche, the voices of the Saints singing "The Old, Old Path" in Merwin's Plaza at Kohunlich. In the astonishing grandeur of Calakmul, the moat at Becan, in the way that brothers Travis and Vitaliy helped Sister Traci climb the ruins at Yaxchilan. My testimony came by way of strangers, happy to give and to receive, glad in their simple lives so different from our own, and by way of advice from Brother Eric Odida. At every turn we were blessed with testimony and provided for by God's own hand. Just when things would seem difficult or impossible, by our faith and God's will, it was done.

In the year and months leading up to this trip to Mexico, I was too nervous and caught up in other things to be excited. In fact, to be honest, when I heard that it had been decided that we would go to Mexico, I was disappointed. Then, Mexico had seemed so common, so usual. Why weren't we going somewhere more . . . exotic, like Guatemala, or somewhere more impressive, like Belize? It wasn't until we had climbed our first pyramid in Dzibanche that the reality hit me square in the face. I had climbed pyramids before in Belize and had expected the ones in Mexico to be no different, but God soon made sure that I knew it was not so.

Today if you asked me to go to Mexico tomorrow, I'd have my bags packed by midnight. Two years ago, if you had told me that my life would be changed by 11 days in Mexico, I'm not sure I would have believed you. Mexico was beyond anything I thought it might be, and I'm not sure that any other trip on foreign lands will measure up. Now, I ask myself who I have to thank for this wonderful blessing, this testimony of my belief. All thanks and glory be to God, for it was through Him that this journey was possible and that each of those who traveled with us made such an impress upon my heart.

## Book of Mormon Land Testimonies

by Brother Gary Livingston

I looked forward with much anticipation to our trip to Mesoamerica to tour a portion of the lands of the Book of Mormon. I have had a deep and abiding love for the Book of Mormon starting from the time I was a young teenager when I was first told that I had a work for God and it would be good for me to read and study the Book of Mormon. The testimonies I received on this trip and the things I saw that delighted me are too numerous to name in this short article, but I will share one experience I will always remember.

I am a very visual learner and as I read and study the scriptures it is in my nature to try to visualize and feel things that those who authored the scriptures must have seen and felt in any given situation. I will never forget standing at the top of one of the many pyramids we climbed and looking out over the landscape. We were well above the "umbrella" of the forest and we could clearly see for miles and miles in every direction. My mind was taken to the account in the Book of Mormon when King Noah was being pursued by Gideon. The wicked king fled to the top of a tower near the temple where he cast his eyes round about and saw the Lamanites in the distance within the borders of the land getting ready for battle. I've always had a hard time picturing this event in my mind, but when I stood at the top of that pyramid, I could clearly visualize something very similar to what King Noah must have seen. That experience will never escape me as it wasn't limited to just what I saw, but the power of that experience came through what I felt at that moment. I understand this might be considered a very "small" testimony by others, but for me it is only one of many testimonies I received and one that I delighted in and will never forget.



## Book of Mormon Land Testimonies

*by Sister Deanne Murnieks*

God is so good and His blessings are so generous. I will never cease to be amazed by His constant goodness. The trip to Central America was, of course, absolutely amazing and beyond my highest expectations. The sites were spectacular, and the knowledge and experiences gained cannot be measured. I have always loved Book of Mormon archaeology, and was very excited for this opportunity to see the Book of Mormon lands first hand. I was especially blessed that my children were also able to attend and receive such marvelous testimonies of God's goodness.

Many things were done in preparation for this trip, both spiritual and temporal. One of the things we decided to do as a family was to bring with us enough Spanish Books of Mormon to be able to give one away each day of the trip. We were extremely touched by all of those to whom we were able to give the books. Their excitement at receiving them was truly a delight to our souls. The word of God is like honey to the soul, and to give it as a gift is a blessing to both the recipient and the giver.

The fellowship among the Saints was also particularly sweet, and I feel that new relationships have been kindled and old ones strengthened in marvelous ways. What a blessing it is whenever we are able to have even a small taste of what it will be like when we are truly of one heart and one mind.

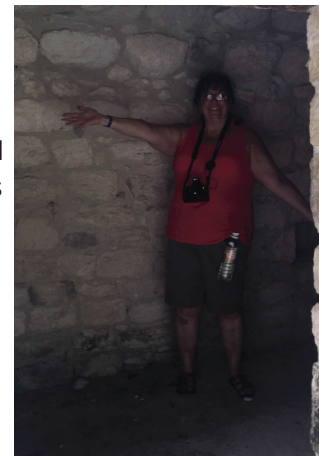
However, all of these things were anticipated and even expected. What was completely unexpected was the way that God used this time to answer many prayers that had been on my heart, large and small; most of them completely unrelated to the purpose of the trip, many of them from years ago, and far too many to be numbered. We had given time to prepare spiritually for the trip as well, and fully expected to receive a blessing at His merciful hand. Yet, His blessings were so abundant and surpassed any expectation I could have had. With the busy-ness of our lives lately, I needed this extended time away to focus on the Lord more than I knew. He strengthened my heart and renewed my faith in ways I didn't even fully realize that I needed, or were possible. He remembered prayers that I had offered for my children, and our family, long ago, and showed how He is working in our lives to fulfill those promises. He renewed my zeal for the work of His Kingdom in these last days, and blessed my children with the satisfaction that comes from sharing the fullness of the gospel to those who have never heard. I feel so humbled and inadequate to receive such abundance from Him when I know that I, of myself, am completely unworthy. Yet, He is the most generous and loving of fathers.



## Book of Mormon Land Testimonies

*by Sister Traci Scuito*

This trip was so wonderful; there are so many testimonies that could be shared. I was so blessed with the kindness of my brothers and sisters assisting me along the way. Calakmul was a favorite for me, because I wanted to climb the highest pyramid and even if that was all I could do then I would be happy. So climbing the #2 pyramid at Calakmul did take its toll on me. I was in tears when I got to the top (or what I thought was the top). Brother Aaron said there were a few more steps to go and I honestly didn't think I would make it, but if I didn't try I would regret it, so I climbed/crawled up the last 20-25 steps with a helping hand for the last step. The view was amazing seeing the tops of the pyramids and being above the rain forest. The Lord blessed me that day and each day after, because I was able to climb many more pyramids including the highest staircase in the Yucatan.



## Book of Mormon Land Testimonies

*by Brother Jim Clark*

I have always shared a great affinity for the Book of Mormon and the Book of Mormon lands with my father and mother. As Brother Brian discussed with us the possibility of traveling to Mesoamerica with Brother Lyle Smith, I was very intrigued. To realize an opportunity to walk within the borders of these lands seemed unbelievable. However, as the time drew near, the challenge of being a small business owner loomed large. My lease was up in July, and I knew if I renewed it I would not be able to go. If I did not renew my lease I would be unemployed, which prospect was of great concern for me. I continued to stall month after month as the franchisor and lessor pressed for resolution. Finally, the end of November was upon me and I was as torn as ever. If I was to go on this trip I had to give thirty day notice now, and close my business. Worse yet as we would leave on the 26th of December, I would have to move out of my space on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. The prospect of working during this important holiday, and asking others to do the same seemed unthinkable. I would embark on this trip unemployed as well. The alternative was to stay home. I agonized over the decision with much prayer, seeing no easy solution. Finally, with much anxiety and the prayers of many I did give my thirty day notice.

To my surprise I was met with uncommon understanding and creativity from both the landlord and franchisor. They expressed a great desire to work towards the possibility of a new lease. I embraced their generosity; however, I explained I was already planning on going on a two week trip. As two of my three employees were going as well, keeping my store open would prove impossible, yet closing temporarily was impossible also, as stores must be open in a mall environment. To deviate from this would lead to every store at one time or another having to close for an "emergency". It simply cannot be allowed, and has never been allowed in the forty-three year history of the mall, until now. On December 19th upon returning from caroling with the Saints, I received an email from my landlord. The owners of the mall had met on my behalf and decided that I would be allowed to close my business December 24th, and reopen it on January 7th. I cannot express in words the magnitude and improbability of this permission, many continue to question me about it even today as it cannot be understood or believed amongst my peers. It most certainly is without precedent, and a testament that anything is possible through our Heavenly Father. I do not know what will be concerning my business as we work through uncertain processes, however, what a tremendous blessing this afforded me and my family that I did not have to vacate on Christmas, and more importantly, was allowed to travel on this adventure! All praise and glory unto our God, from which all blessings flow!

