

Brief Outline
Theology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
(The Mormons)

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Summary

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (The Mormons) has become a mainstream religion and can no longer be considered a “cult.” By a somewhat liberal definition, the church must be considered “Christian.” The Mormons believe in Jesus Christ as the redeemer of the world and they believe in God the Father as the Creator of the entire Universe.

Although the origins and theology of the church are far removed from mainstream Christianity, the church promotes the highest of ethics, morals, and human behavior. Whether their beliefs are true or not, the Mormons are among the most upright and decent people on the earth.

Evidence based on actual behavior shows that their devotion to family, country, and Christian values cannot be questioned.

If all Christians behaved in a similar manner, the world would be a better place.

Table of Contents

Summary	2
Table of Contents	3
A Brief History	4
Joseph Smith’s search for truth	4
The Great Apostasy	4
The Golden Plates	4
The Book of Mormon	5
The Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price	5
Brigham Young Continues as Prophet	5
Polygamy	5
Marriage for Time and All Eternity	6
The Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	6
Commentary on The Articles of Faith	7
Heaven and Other Beliefs	13
Kingdoms of Glory	13
Celestial Kingdom	13
Terrestrial Kingdom	14
Telestial Kingdom	14
Perdition	14
Premortal Life	15
Priesthood, Church Organization, and Governance	15
Administration	15
The Priesthood	16
Women in the Church	17
Social Welfare Programs	18
Latter-Day Prophecies	18
Baptism and Confirmation	19
Some Demographics	19

A Brief History

Joseph Smith's search for truth

In 1823 Joseph Smith was 14 years old. His mother was of one faith and his father another. Many evangelists were proselytizing even other expressions of Christianity. Confused by all the choices, Joseph prayed for guidance and was visited by God the Father and Jesus Christ the son¹.

The Great Apostasy

Over the course of the next several years, guided by the angel Moroni, Joseph learned that the authority of Christ had been removed from the earth during the Great Apostasy characterized by the corruption of the leaders of the Church in the sixth or seventh century which caused God to remove his “keys of authority” from all mankind. Moroni told Joseph that he was to restore the Gospel.²

The Golden Plates

Moroni guided Joseph to a hill near Palmyra, New York, where the Golden Plates lay hidden beneath a round stone. With the plates was a set of priest's vestments (Urim and Thummim) and a seer stone which may have been a small rock shaped like a donut.



This is a picture of an ancient priest of Israel in what might have been classic Urim and Thummim. It is not likely that Smith used incense but, according to some he could not translate the hieroglyphics on the plates unless he wore a garment similar to this. Others say he also put a “seer stone” in his hat and, burying his face into the hat, dictated the words supposedly from the plates.

¹Lds.org

² Doctrine and Covenants 1

The Book of Mormon

From these plates arose the Book of Mormon which describes itself as “another testament of Jesus Christ.” It is, it explains, the stories of some of the Lost Tribes of Israel and their journey to and their life in South America. It is from these writings that the LDS Church gains much of its theology.

The Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price

Two other books define Mormon beliefs: The Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. The D & C contains revelations God handed down to leaders of the Church, mostly to Joseph Smith. Ideally the book was supposed to be updated from time to time with new revelations. There have been only two updates; one in 1890 to eliminate plural marriage and one in 1978 to admit men of African descent into the priesthood. Modern revelations are recorded in other church documents.

The Pearl of Great Price contains further revelations and narrations by Joseph Smith along with the thirteen Articles of Faith which, like our Creed, define LDS beliefs.

Brigham Young Continues as Prophet

Shortly after the assassination of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young became the church’s “prophet, seer, and revelator” in 1844. He remained as the church’s president until his death in 1877. Young organized a large band of the faithful in an historic trek west to what is now Utah where the church, although beset by many problems, grew in numbers and strength of belief. Young founded the Tabernacle Choir, many schools, and designed the beautiful and well-planned Salt Lake City.³

Polygamy

Although the practice of plural marriage began with Smith, Young was responsible for promulgating the idea to a much greater extent. It is thought that one-third of the Utah Mormon men had more than one wife. Young himself had 52 wives.⁴

Plural marriage, contrary to the church’s critics, had very moral and practical purposes. In first place, because of severe deadly persecution of the Mormons, there were far more women than men and those women needed the support and care of husbands since many had no means of earning a living. Further, since they believe that only married people can obtain the highest level of Heaven, plural marriages afforded the women without prospects the chance of highest exaltation.

Equally important to the church is their belief that all the souls in Heaven needed to be born on earth before Christ could return. Since unmarried women must remain celibate, the birth rate would have been drastically reduced without plural marriage.

³ Brigham Young University Press

⁴ Wikipedia

Plural marriage was eliminated in 1890 when then President Wilford Woodruff received revelation from God that polygamy was no longer necessary and, in fact, was prohibited. It is interesting and seemingly not coincidental that this revelation occurred soon after the US Congress disallowed Utah statehood because of the illegal practice. Utah was granted statehood in 1896.

Marriage for Time and All Eternity

Mormons believe that with the proper ceremonies under proper circumstances, men and women can be “sealed” and live together not only in this life but forever. Divorce is strongly discouraged and chastity before marriage is a firm rule. Adultery is strictly forbidden.

It is not clear from church documents how this “sealing” works for plural marriages or second marriages after the death of a spouse.

The Articles of Faith

of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ⁵

1. We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.
2. We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.
3. We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.
4. We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.
5. We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.
6. We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.
7. We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth.
8. We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

⁵ Pearl of Great Price

9. We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.
10. We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.
11. We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.
12. We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.
13. We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

Joseph Smith

Commentary on The Articles of Faith⁶

1. We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.

"There are three separate persons in the Godhead: God, the Eternal Father; his Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost. We believe in each of them (A of F 1: 1). From latter-day revelation we learn that the Father and the Son have tangible bodies of flesh and bone and that the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit, without flesh and bone (D&C 130: 22-23). These three persons are one in perfect unity and harmony of purpose and doctrine (John 17: 21-23; 2 NE 31: 21; 3 NE 11: 27, 36)."⁷

2. We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.

"Some people believe Adam and Eve committed a serious sin when they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. However, latter-day scriptures help us understand that their fall was a necessary step in the plan of life and a great blessing to all of us. Because of the Fall, we are blessed with physical bodies, the right to choose between good and evil, and the opportunity to gain eternal life. None of these privileges would have been ours had Adam and Eve remained in the garden."

⁶ From LDS.about.com/library/bl/primary/aa13_articles_of_faith.htm

⁷ Quoted material here and throughout is copied from LDS.org or LDS.about.com

3. We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel

"As used in the scriptures, to atone is to suffer the penalty for an act of sin, thereby removing the effects of sin from the repentant sinner and allowing him to be reconciled to God. Jesus Christ was the only one capable of making a perfect atonement for all mankind."

(Mormons do not believe in "grace" thinking instead that salvation comes from good works alone. Baptism does not confer grace but does initiate one into the church membership. -rk)⁸

4. We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost

"Confidence in something or someone. As most often used in the scriptures, faith is confidence and trust in Jesus Christ that lead a person to obey him. Faith must be centered in Jesus Christ in order for it to lead a person to salvation."

"A change of mind and heart that brings a fresh attitude toward God, oneself, and life in general. Repentance implies that a person turns away from evil and turns his heart and will to God, submitting to God's commandments and desires and forsaking sin. True repentance comes from a love for God and a sincere desire to obey his commandments. All accountable persons have sinned and must repent in order to progress toward salvation. Only through the atonement of Jesus Christ can our repentance become effective and accepted by God."

"Baptism by immersion in water by one having authority is the introductory ordinance of the gospel and is necessary to become a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is preceded by faith in Jesus Christ and by repentance. It must be followed by receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost in order to be complete (2 NE 31: 13-14). Baptism by water and the Spirit is necessary before a person can enter the celestial kingdom. Adam was the first to be baptized (Moses 6: 64-65). Jesus also was baptized to fulfill all righteousness and to show the way for all mankind (Matt. 3: 13-17; 2 NE 31: 5-12)."

"The power of the Holy Ghost can come upon a person before baptism and witness that the gospel is true. But the right to have the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, whenever one is worthy, is a gift that can be received only by the laying on of hands by a Melchizedek Priesthood holder after authorized baptism into the true Church of Jesus Christ."

⁸ Italicized material is this author's comment

5. We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.

"To be called of God is to receive an appointment or invitation from him or his duly authorized Church leaders to serve him in a particular way."

"A prophecy consists of divinely inspired words or writings, which a person receives through revelation from the Holy Ghost. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19: 10). A prophecy may pertain to the past, present, or future. When a person prophesies, he speaks or writes that which God wants him to know, for his own good or the good of others. Individuals may receive prophecy or revelation for their own lives."

"The act of placing one's hands on a person's head as part of a priesthood ordinance. Many priesthood ordinances are performed by the laying on of hands, such as ordinations, blessings, administering to the sick, confirming Church membership, and conferring the Holy Ghost."

6. We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.

"Although a person may receive authority by ordination, he uses it under the direction of those who hold the particular keys for that authority."

7. We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth.

"The scriptures contain many examples of miraculous healings by the Lord and his servants."

8. We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

"The word bible means "the books." The Bible is the work of many prophets and inspired writers acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1: 21)... The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reveres and respects the Bible and affirms also that the Lord continues to give additional revelation through his prophets in the last days that supports and verifies the biblical account of God's dealings with mankind."

"The Book of Mormon is a religious record of three groups of people who migrated from the Old World to the American continents. These groups were led by prophets who recorded their religious and secular histories on metal plates. The Book of Mormon records the visit of Jesus Christ to the people in the Americas following his resurrection. A two hundred-year era of peace followed that visit of Christ."

"Moroni, the last of the Nephite prophet-historians, sealed up the abridged records of these people and hid them in about A.D. 421. In 1823, the resurrected Moroni visited Joseph Smith and later delivered to him these ancient and sacred records to be translated and brought forth to the world as another testament of Jesus Christ."

9. We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

"The kingdom of God on earth is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (D&C 65). The purpose of the Church is to prepare its members to live forever in the celestial kingdom or kingdom of heaven. However, the scriptures sometimes call the Church the kingdom of heaven, meaning that the Church is the kingdom of heaven on earth

"The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the kingdom of God on the earth, but it is at present limited to an ecclesiastical kingdom. During the Millennium, the kingdom of God will be both political and ecclesiastical."

"The Lord reveals his work to his prophets and confirms to believers that the revelations to the prophets are true (Amos 3: 7). Through revelation, the Lord provides individual guidance for every person who seeks it and who has faith, repents, and is obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ." The Holy Ghost is a revelator," said Joseph Smith, and "no man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations."

"In the Lord's Church, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are prophets, seers, and revelators to the Church and to the world. The President of the Church is the only one whom the Lord has authorized to receive revelation for the Church (D&C 28: 2-7). Every person may receive personal revelation for his own benefit."

10. We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.

"The scattering of Israel: The Lord scattered and afflicted the twelve tribes of Israel because of their unrighteousness and rebellion. However, the Lord also used this scattering of his chosen people among the nations of the world to bless those nations.... The Lord gathers his people Israel when they accept him and keep his commandments.... The ten lost tribes of Israel: The ten tribes of Israel made up the northern kingdom of Israel and were carried away captive into Assyria in 721 B.C. At that time they went to the "north countries" and became lost to the knowledge of others. In the last days they will return."

"In the latter-days a city named Zion will be built near Jackson County, Missouri (United States of America), to which the tribes of Israel will gather (D&C 103: 11-22; 133: 18). The Saints are counseled to build up Zion wherever they are living in the world."



(Mormons believe that this was also the site of the Garden of Eden and that Adam and his family arose here. -rk)

"At the beginning of the Millennial Era, Christ will return to the earth. This event will mark the end of the mortal probation of this earth. The wicked will be removed from the earth and the righteous will be caught up in a cloud while the earth is

cleansed. While no man knows exactly when Christ will come for the second time, he has given us signs to watch for that indicate the time is drawing near (Matt. 24; JS-M 1)."

11. We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.

"We are born with a natural capacity to distinguish between right and wrong because of the Light of Christ that is given to every person (D&C 84: 46). This faculty is called conscience. The possession of it makes us responsible beings. Like other faculties, our consciences may be deadened through sin or misuse."

12. We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.

"WE believe that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man; and that he holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them, both in making laws and administering them, for the good and safety of society.

"We believe that no government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property, and the protection of life.

"We believe that all governments necessarily require civil officers and magistrates to enforce the laws of the same; and that such as will administer the law in equity and justice should be sought for and upheld by the voice of the people if a republic, or the will of the sovereign.

"We believe that religion is instituted of God; and that men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it, unless their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others; but we do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion; that the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul.

"We believe that all men are bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside, while protected in their inherent and inalienable rights by the laws of such governments; and that sedition and rebellion are unbecoming every citizen thus protected, and should be punished accordingly; and that all governments have a right to enact such laws as in their own judgments are best calculated to secure the public interest; at the same time, however, holding sacred the freedom of conscience.

"We believe that every man should be honored in his station, rulers and magistrates as such, being placed for the protection of the innocent and the punishment of the guilty; and that to the laws all men show respect and deference, as without them peace and harmony would be supplanted by anarchy and terror; human laws being instituted for the express purpose of regulating our interests as individuals and nations, between man and man; and divine laws given of heaven, prescribing rules on spiritual concerns, for faith and worship, both to be answered by man to his Maker.

"We believe that rulers, states, and governments have a right, and are bound to enact laws for the protection of all citizens in the free exercise of their religious belief; but we do not believe that they have a right in justice to deprive citizens of this privilege, or proscribe them in their opinions, so long as a regard and reverence are shown to the laws and such religious opinions do not justify sedition nor conspiracy.

"We believe that the commission of crime should be punished according to the nature of the offense; that murder, treason, robbery, theft, and the breach of the general peace, in all respects, should be punished according to their criminality and their tendency to evil among men, by the laws of that government in which the offense is committed; and for the public peace and tranquility all men should step forward and use their ability in bringing offenders against good laws to punishment.

"We do not believe it just to mingle religious influence with civil government, whereby one religious society is fostered and another proscribed in its spiritual privileges, and the individual rights of its members, as citizens, denied.

"We believe that all religious societies have a right to deal with their members for disorderly conduct, according to the rules and regulations of such societies; provided that such dealings be for fellowship and good standing; but we do not believe that any religious society has authority to try men on the right of property or life, to take from them this world's goods, or to put them in jeopardy of either life or limb, or to inflict any physical punishment upon them. They can only excommunicate them from their society, and withdraw from them their fellowship.

"We believe that men should appeal to the civil law for redress of all wrongs and grievances, where personal abuse is inflicted or the right of property or character infringed, where such laws exist as will protect the same; but we believe that all men are justified in defending themselves, their friends, and property, and the government, from the unlawful assaults and encroachments of all persons in times of exigency, where immediate appeal cannot be made to the laws, and relief afforded."

13. We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

*(Mormons are famous for strong family life, educational excellence, and their love of the arts. One of the most important regulations of the church is the "Word of Wisdom" which prohibits the use of any form of caffeine, tobacco, or alcohol.)*⁹

Heaven and Other Beliefs

Kingdoms of Glory

There are three kingdoms of glory: the celestial kingdom, the terrestrial kingdom, and the telestial kingdom. "The glory we inherit will depend on the depth of our conversion, expressed by our obedience to the Lord's commandments. It will depend on the manner in which we have 'received the testimony of Jesus.'"¹⁰

Celestial Kingdom

The celestial kingdom is the highest of the three kingdoms of glory. Those in this kingdom will dwell forever in the presence of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. The good Mormon's ultimate goal is to inherit celestial glory and to help others receive that great blessing as well. Such a goal is not achieved in one attempt; it is the result of a lifetime of righteousness and constancy of purpose.

The celestial kingdom is the place prepared for those who have "received the testimony of Jesus" and been "made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood." To inherit this gift, Mormons must receive the ordinances of salvation, keep the commandments, and repent of our sins.

In January 1836 the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation that expanded his understanding of the requirements to inherit celestial glory. The heavens were opened to

⁹ D&C: 89

¹⁰ LDS.org

him, and he saw the celestial kingdom. He marveled when he saw his older brother Alvin there, even though Alvin had died before receiving the ordinance of baptism.

Then the voice of the Lord came to the Prophet Joseph:

"All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God; "Also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom; "For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts."

Commenting on this revelation, the Prophet Joseph said, "I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven."

From another revelation to the Prophet Joseph, we learn that there are three degrees within the celestial kingdom. To be exalted in the highest degree and continue eternally in family relationships, we must enter into "the new and everlasting covenant of marriage" and be true to that covenant. In other words, temple marriage is a requirement for obtaining the highest degree of celestial glory. All who are worthy to enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage will have that opportunity, whether in this life or the next.¹¹

Terrestrial Kingdom

Those who inherit terrestrial glory will "receive of the presence of the Son, but not of the fulness of the Father. Wherefore, they are bodies terrestrial, and not bodies celestial, and differ in glory as the moon differs from the sun." Generally speaking, individuals in the terrestrial kingdom will be honorable people "who were blinded by the craftiness of men." This group will include members of the Church who were "not valiant in the testimony of Jesus". It will also include those who rejected the opportunity to receive the gospel in mortality but who later received it in the postmortal spirit world.¹²

Telestial Kingdom

Telestial glory will be reserved for individuals who "received not the gospel of Christ, neither the testimony of Jesus." These individuals will receive their glory after being redeemed from spirit prison, which is sometimes called hell.¹³

Perdition

Some people will not be worthy to dwell in any kingdom of glory. They will be called "the sons of perdition" and will have to "abide a kingdom which is not a kingdom of glory." This will be the state of "those who know [God's] power, and have been made

¹¹ D&C:76

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

partakers thereof, and suffered themselves through the power of the devil to be overcome, and to deny the truth and defy [God's] power.”¹⁴

Premortal Life

“Before we were born on the earth, we lived in the presence of our Heavenly Father as one of His spirit children. In this premortal existence, we attended a council with Heavenly Father's other spirit children. At that council, Heavenly Father presented His great plan of happiness.”¹⁵

“In harmony with the plan of happiness, the premortal Jesus Christ, the Firstborn Son of the Father in the spirit, covenanted to be the Savior. Those who followed Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ were permitted to come to the earth to experience mortality and progress toward eternal life. Lucifer, another spirit son of God, rebelled against the plan and ‘sought to destroy the agency of man.’ He became Satan, and he and his followers were cast out of heaven and denied the privileges of receiving a physical body and experiencing mortality.”¹⁶

“Throughout our premortal lives, we developed our identity and increased our spiritual capabilities. Blessed with the gift of agency, we made important decisions, such as the decision to follow Heavenly Father's plan. These decisions affected our life then and now. We grew in intelligence and learned to love the truth, and we prepared to come to the earth, where we could continue to progress.”¹⁷

(There were three groups of souls in the pre-existence: Those who sided with Christ, those who stood with Lucifer, and a third group who took no side. Those who were undecided were marked with the “stain of Cain” and were born the black persons of African descent. –rk)

(One of the foremost reasons LDS families are usually large is the social pressure applied to couples to do their part to empty heaven of the souls still waiting to be born. Christ cannot begin His final reign until all those pre-existent souls have been born. –rk)

Priesthood, Church Organization, and Governance

Administration

The LDS church is headed by a President and two Counselors – called the presidency. The president is the church’s “Prophet, Seer, and Revelator.” The second tier of authority rests with the Quorum of Twelve Apostles who direct the efforts of the First and Second

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ BoM: Moses 3:5; LDS.org

¹⁶ D&C:29:36; LDS.org

¹⁷ BoM op.Cit.; PoGP Abr 3

Quorums of Seventy who direct the rest of the church's administration throughout the world.

Geographically, the church is divided into areas, stakes, and wards. There are, in small areas, also missions, districts, and branches. Areas have presidencies (a president and first and second counselors); stakes have presidencies and wards have bishoprics (a bishop and first and second counselor). A ward is the small local congregation made up of families who reside within well-defined boundaries. When the membership of a ward grows too large, the boundaries are re-drawn and a new ward is formed.

The church has no paid, professional clergy. All its officers, administrators, and other "servants" are volunteers who have been "called" or "ordained" to serve a particular role. Unless they are retired or very wealthy, most have careers outside the church. Women are encouraged to be stay-at-home mothers but many are gainfully employed.

Women can not serve as bishops, counselors or presidents because they cannot hold the priesthood which is only for men.

The Priesthood

Active young men of "worthy and good character" are almost automatically ordained to the priesthood at age twelve. Girls, of course, cannot hold any degree of priesthood.

There are two priesthoods: the Melchizedek and Aaronic. Typically, young men between the ages of 12 and 19 are the holders of the offices of this minor Aaronic priesthood although all males, even adult converts, must hold the Aaronic priesthood before they can progress to the Melchizedek. There are three Aaronic offices: Deacon (typically 12 and 13 year olds), Teacher (14 and 15), and Priest (16 and up). Smith says that John the Baptist conferred the Aaronic priesthood on him right after The Baptist baptized him.

The offices of the Melchizedek Priesthood are Apostle, Seventy, patriarch, high priest, and elder (from highest office to lowest). The President of the High Priesthood is the President of the Church. Men in the Church must be worthy Melchizedek Priesthood holders in order to receive the temple endowment and be sealed to their families for eternity. They have the authority to administer to the sick and give special blessings to family members and others. With the authorization of presiding priesthood leaders, they can bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost and ordain other worthy men to offices in the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods.

When a man receives the Melchizedek Priesthood, he enters into the oath and covenant of the priesthood. He covenants to be faithful, magnify his calling, "give diligent heed to the words of eternal life," and "live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God." Those who keep this covenant will be sanctified by the Spirit and receive "all that [the] Father hath."¹⁸

¹⁸ D&C 84

Smith says that Adam held the Melchizedek Priesthood and it existed on the earth until it was taken away during the Great Apostasy. The apostles Peter, James, and John restored it to the earth when they ordained Smith.¹⁹

Because of the “stain” from their pre-mortal ambivalence, African men and the male descendants of Africans were not allowed to hold any office of the priesthood until a 1978 revelation to church president Spencer W. Kimball which opened the priesthood to all worthy males.

Women in the Church

Although women in the LDS Church are not allowed to hold the priesthood or administrative offices in the hierarchy of church governance, their roles are, nonetheless, very important. First and foremost, women are largely responsible for the teaching of children and they hold positions of honor in Sunday School and other youth programs. If nothing else, Mormons take special care in teaching and nurturing their children and the women are the primary caregivers and instructors in most of the programs the church sponsors except, of course, for the Boy Scouts of America which is also strongly promoted in the church.

Almost all adult women belong to an organization called Relief Society. The stated goals and objectives the organization has for its members are these:

- Increase their testimonies of Jesus Christ through prayer and scripture study.
- Seek spiritual strength by following the promptings of the Holy Ghost.
- Dedicate themselves to strengthening marriages, families, and homes.
- Find nobility in motherhood and joy in womanhood.
- Delight in service and good works.
- Love life and learning.
- Stand for truth and righteousness.
- Sustain the priesthood as the authority of God on the earth.
- Rejoice in the blessings of the temple. Understand their divine destiny and strive for exaltation.²⁰

More practically, the Relief Society spends a great deal of its resources helping families – Mormon and non-Mormon alike – who are in any kind of need from financial to child care to emotional support. Note that one of the objectives is to “Delight in service and good works” – Mormons believe that salvation is attained by, among other things, “good works” and, therefore, assisting others in social welfare work is nearly a guarantee of at least the lowest, if not the highest, level of Heaven.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ LDS.org

Social Welfare Programs

Driven in good measure by their belief that salvation is attained largely by good works, Mormons are very committed to Humanitarian Aid programs worldwide. They operate employment centers, food banks, and second-hand stores called Deseret Industries which are similar to St. Vincent DePaul or Goodwill operations. In many areas they own “welfare farms” or ranches which employ young people or unemployed people in the area and the produce is shared with needy families.

Funded by a strongly promoted almost mandatory “tithing,” the church has distributed thousands of tons of food, medical supplies, and educational materials to disaster ravaged countries around the world. Additionally they have donated millions of dollars to many relief causes worldwide. Supporting victims of Hurricane Katrina, for example, Mormons donated over 42,000 man hours of labor, 200 semi-truck loads of food and supplies, hundreds of sets of linens, and large amounts of cash.²¹

This author is aware of a study done in his home state of Idaho where federal auditors discovered statistics showing that the poor were not being served well by state agencies. Later investigation showed that the poor were, indeed, being served but not by government but instead by the LDS Church.

Mormons believe, further, that they themselves should not be burdens upon others. They promulgate a strong work ethic, emphasize savings, and encourage education to improve employment prospects. Each Mormon family has been ordered to store two years’ worth of food and water so that, in the event of a natural or man-made disaster, the family’s basic needs would not be left to the welfare of others.

Latter-Day Prophecies

According to their ninth Article of Faith, the Latter-Day-Saints believe in ongoing prophecy. The First Presidency – the church’s president along with his first and second counselors – are primarily responsible for all new revelation. The president, his counselors and the Quorum of the Twelve are all “prophets, seers, and revelators” called by God to receive prophecies to further reveal the Kingdom to the Saints on earth.

The Doctrine and Covenants and *The Pearl of Great Price* contain many prophecies from the leaders of the early church, mostly Joseph Smith. Three of the most notable prophecies concern a foretelling of the Civil War, the repeal of plural marriage, and the opening of the LDS Priesthood to men of African heritage. Most of the prophecies announced today concern the governance of the church and all its organizations, missions, and programs. There is hardly any way to know if, indeed, these revelations actually come from God.

²¹ LDS.org

There are anecdotes that claim that many of the prophecies are wild and weird. One such story, for example, is that Joseph Smith, supported later by restatement by Brigham Young, received revelation from God that there was a race of giants living on the Moon. The story is so pervasive that it must contain a large measure of truth.

Other, better documented mistaken prophecies include the prediction that the Lord would return in 1891, that the North would lose the Civil War, and that the Church would dominate the world from its headquarters in Missouri before 1850.

Other “prophecies” seem to contain a sort of revisionist history and subtle changes to their teachings to bring their beliefs more in line and more palatable to the world’s mainstream Christian churches.

There is no compendium of modern (post 1930) revelations available to either outsiders or regular church members. The writings of the prophets are contained in volumes stored in the church archives far from the sight of most of us.

Baptism and Confirmation

Mormon children are not baptized until age 8 when they are deemed to have reached the “age of reason.” All children under that age are received into the Celestial Kingdom automatically since they cannot be knowingly guilty of sin.

Immediately after baptism (by immersion in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost) the new member is confirmed by “laying on of hands” by a Melchizedek Priesthood holder for “the Gift of the Holy Ghost.”

“Jesus Christ taught that baptism is essential to the salvation of all who have lived on earth (see John 3:5). Many people, however, have died without being baptized. Others were baptized without proper authority. Because God is merciful, He has prepared a way for all people to receive the blessings of baptism. By performing proxy baptisms in behalf of those who have died, Church members offer these blessings to deceased ancestors. Individuals can then choose to accept or reject what has been done in their behalf.”²²

Some Demographics

Because of the Latter-day Saint influence in Utah, the state has the lowest child poverty rate, lowest teen pregnancy rate, highest high school graduation rate, and the lowest military recruitment rate among all U.S. states.

Their end-of-year statistical report for 2005 shows:

- A total membership of 12,560,869 members including 52,060 full time missionaries.

²² LDS.org

- 2,701 stakes, 643 districts, 341 missions and 27,087 wards and branches.
- 122 temples are in operation, including temples dedicated during 2005 at San Antonio, TX; Aba Nigeria; and Newport Beach, CA
- There are 5.7 million LDS members in the U.S., 3 million in South America, 1 million in Mexico, 448 thousand in Europe, 404 thousand in the South Pacific, and 172 thousand in Canada

(These numbers are likely very conservative. The church has never been very forthcoming with its statistics and internal data. It is possible that the real numbers could easily be double the published information. Certainly these numbers do not include children under 8 or adults baptized by some missionaries in foreign countries. It is not known how many of the registered members are active and in good standing and no one knows how many excommunications take place each year. --rk)