

# **From the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations**

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is one of Salt Lake City's best known features because of their beautiful headquarters campus, which includes museums, music, and parks and plazas where you can sit and enjoy the peace. Not far from the center of the city is the headquarters for their outreach programs that provide work and education for people at risk, people new to this country, and others in need. Their focus is on empowering people to succeed. They provide food and clothing to help with immediate needs, and then help them find the skills they need to step out on their own.

Many of the people you will meet working in the Convention Center, the hotels, restaurants, and shops will be Mormons. Many will not. One of the largest groups of people in Salt Lake City claiming a denominational affiliation is Roman Catholic. People from just about every Christian denomination and the world's major religions are represented in Salt Lake City.

Because of their important role as founders of the city and their history, about which non-Mormons do not often hear a great deal, The Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations is offering you "Mormonism 101," a document prepared by the Latter-day Saints leaders and staff for our information.

The Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations offers the following information that was prepared by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for our use.

If you are curious to know more, we suggest you take time to visit Temple Square and the museum, and listen to their stories.

# About the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

**Note: The following was written by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at the request of the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations.**

## Introduction

The religious experience of Church members is based on a spiritual witness from God through the Holy Spirit regarding the teachings, mission, and divinity of Jesus Christ. The Church's role is to help aid its members in their quest to follow Christ's teachings. Therefore, the Church's core doctrines strive in every instance to align with Christ's teachings as outlined in the Holy Bible and other sacred scripture, including the Book of Mormon.

President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught, "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior." Latter-day Saints believe that the Church's scripturally based teachings change lives by motivating people to become more like the Savior.

With this understanding in mind, the following series of answers to frequently asked questions about the Church's teachings should help further illuminate what Latter-day Saints believe, clarify doctrinal distinctions and outline the commonalities shared by our respective faiths. The list of questions is not comprehensive but represents some of the most common inquiries the Church receives.

## Frequently Asked Questions

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## **Are Mormons Christian?**

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints consider themselves to be Christians. They would describe the Church as a Christian church, but one that is neither Catholic nor Protestant. Rather, Latter-day Saints consider it to be a restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ as originally established by the Savior in their interpretation of the New Testament. The Church does not subscribe to the creeds that are central to many other Christian churches.

Latter-day Saints believe God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to save all mankind from death and individual sins. Jesus Christ is central to the lives of Church members. They seek to follow His example by being baptized, praying in His holy name, partaking of the sacrament, doing good to others and bearing witness of Him through both word and deed. Latter-day Saints believe that the only way to salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ.

## **What do Mormons believe about God?**

God is often referred to in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as our Heavenly Father because He is the Father of all human spirits and they are created in His image. It is an appropriate term for a God who is kind and just, all wise and all powerful. God the Father, His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost constitute the Godhead or Trinity for Mormons. Latter-day Saints believe God is embodied, though His body is perfect and glorified.

## **Do Mormons believe in the Trinity?**

Mormons most commonly use the term “Godhead” to refer to the Trinity. The first Article of Faith for Latter-day Saints reads: “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.” Latter-day Saints believe God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost are one in will and purpose but are not literally the same being or substance, as conceptions of the Holy Trinity described in the creeds commonly imply.

## **What is the Mormon view of the purpose of life?**

For Latter-day Saints, mortal existence is seen in the context of a great sweep of history, from a pre-earth life where the spirits of all mankind lived with Heavenly Father to a future life in His presence where continued growth, learning and improving will take place. Life on earth is regarded as a temporary state in which men and women are tried and tested — and where they gain experiences obtainable nowhere else. They believe God knew humans would make mistakes, so He provided a Savior, His Son Jesus Christ, who would take upon Himself the sins of the world. To members of the

Church, physical death on earth is not an end but the beginning of the next step in God's plan for His children.

### **Do Mormons believe in the Bible?**

The Church reveres the Bible as the word of God, a sacred volume of scripture. Latter-day Saints cherish its teachings and engage in a lifelong study of its divine wisdom. Moreover, during worship services the Bible is pondered and discussed. Church members believe that additional books of scripture — including the Book of Mormon— strengthen and reinforce God's teachings through additional witnesses and provide moving accounts of the personal experiences many individuals had with Jesus Christ. According to Church apostle M. Russell Ballard, "The Book of Mormon does not dilute nor diminish nor deemphasize the Bible. On the contrary, it expands, extends, and exalts it."

### **What is the Book of Mormon?**

In addition to the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, the Church teaches that the Book of Mormon is another testament, or witness, of Jesus Christ. They believe it contains the writings of ancient prophets, giving an account of God's dealings with the peoples on the American continent. For Latter-day Saints it stands alongside the Old and New Testaments of the Bible as holy scripture.

### **What is a Mormon temple?**

Temples existed throughout Biblical times. These buildings were considered the house of the Lord. Latter-day Saint temples are likewise considered houses of the Lord by Church members.

To Latter-day Saints, temples are sacred buildings in which they are taught about their personal relationship to God and about the central role of Jesus Christ in God's plan of salvation. In temples, members of the Church make covenants (sacred promises) with God to live a virtuous and faithful life. In temples, Church members also participate in sacraments on behalf of their deceased ancestors. Mormon temples are also used to perform marriage ceremonies that promise the faithful eternal life with their families. For members of the Church, family is of paramount importance. Only church members who spiritually prepare themselves are certified by their local Bishop to enter the temple.

### **Do Latter-day Saints believe in modern-day prophets?**

Yes. The Church is governed today by apostles, reflecting the way Jesus organized His followers in Biblical times. Three apostles constitute the First Presidency, consisting of the president, or prophet, of the Church and his two counselors. Together with the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, they have

responsibility for leading the Church worldwide and serving as special witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ. Each is accepted by Church members in a prophetic role corresponding to the apostles in the Bible.

### **Do Latter-day Saints believe that the apostles receive revelations from God?**

Yes. When Latter-day Saints speak to God, they call it prayer. When God responds through the influence of the Holy Spirit, members refer to this as revelation. To members of the Church, revelation, in its broad meaning, is divine guidance or inspiration; it is the communication of truth and knowledge from God to His children on earth, suited to their language and understanding. The Bible illustrates different types of revelation, ranging from dramatic visions to gentle feelings — from the “burning bush” to the “still, small voice.” Mormons generally believe that divine guidance comes quietly, taking the form of impressions, thoughts and feelings carried by the Spirit of God.

Most often, revelation unfolds as an ongoing, prayerful dialogue with God: A problem arises, its dimensions are studied out, a question is asked, and if we have sufficient faith, God leads us to answers. Though ultimately a spiritual experience, Latter-day Saints believe revelation also requires careful thought, and that God expects us to seek solutions to questions and problems through prayerful searching and sound thinking.

The First Presidency and members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles receive inspiration to guide the Church as a whole. Individuals are also inspired with revelation regarding how to conduct their lives and how to help and serve others.

### **Do Mormon women lead in the Church?**

All women are daughters of a loving Heavenly Father. Women and men are equal in the sight of God. The Bible says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). In the family, a wife and a husband form an equal partnership in leading and raising a family.

Although not ordained to the priesthood, from the beginning of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, women have played an integral role in the work of the Church. Women serve as leaders, counselors, missionaries, teachers, and in many other responsibilities. They routinely preach from the pulpit and lead congregational prayers in worship services. They serve both in the Church and in their local communities and contribute to the world as leaders in a variety of professions. Their vital and unique contribution to the raising of children is considered an important responsibility and a special privilege of equal importance to priesthood responsibilities.

### **Do Latter-day Saints believe they can become “gods”?**

Latter-day Saints believe that God wants us to become like Him. But this teaching is often misrepresented by those who caricature the faith. The Latter-day Saint belief is no different than the biblical teaching, which states, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:16-17). Through following Christ's teachings, Latter-day Saints believe all people can become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

### **Do Latter-day Saints believe that they will “get their own planet”?**

No. This idea is not taught in Latter-day Saint scripture, nor is it a doctrine of the Church. This misunderstanding stems from speculative comments unreflective of scriptural doctrine. Mormons believe that we are all sons and daughters of God and that all of us have the potential to grow during and after this life to become like our Heavenly Father. The Church does not and has never purported to fully understand the specifics of Christ's statement that “in my Father's house are many mansions” (John 14:2).

### **Do some Latter-day Saints wear temple garments?**

Yes. In our world of diverse religious observance, many people of faith wear special clothing as a reminder of sacred beliefs and commitments. This has been a common practice throughout history.

Today, faithful adult members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints wear temple garments. These garments are simple, white underclothing composed of two pieces: a top piece similar to a T-shirt and a bottom piece similar to shorts. Not unlike the Jewish *tallit katan* (prayer shawl), these garments are worn underneath regular clothes. Temple garments serve as a personal reminder of covenants (sacred promises) made with God to lead good, honorable, Christ-like lives. The wearing of temple garments is an outward expression of an inward commitment to follow the Savior.

Biblical scripture contains many references to the wearing of special garments. In the Old Testament the Israelites are specifically instructed to turn their garments into personal reminders of their covenants with God. Indeed, for some, religious clothing has always been an important part of integrating worship with daily living. Such practices resonate with Latter-day Saints today.

Because of the personal and religious nature of the temple garment, the Church asks all media to report on the subject with respect, treating Latter-day Saint temple garments as they would religious vestments of other faiths. Ridiculing or making light of sacred clothing is highly offensive to Latter-day Saints.

### **Do Latter-day Saints practice polygamy?**

No. The practice of polygamy is strictly prohibited in the Church. The general standard of marriage in the Church has always been monogamy, as indicated in the Book of Mormon. For periods in the Bible polygamy was practiced by the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob, as well as kings David and Solomon. It was again practiced by a minority of Latter-day Saints in the early years of the Church. Polygamy was officially discontinued in 1890 — 124 years ago. Those who practice polygamy today have nothing whatsoever to do with the Church.

### **What is the position of the Church regarding race relations?**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone. The Book of Mormon states, “Black and white, bond and free, male and female; ... all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33). This is the Church’s official teaching.

People of all races have always been welcomed and baptized into the Church since its beginning. In fact, by the end of his life in 1844, Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, opposed slavery. During this time some black males were ordained to the priesthood. By 1852 the Church had stopped ordaining male members of African descent, although there were a few exceptions. Though it is not known precisely why or how this restriction began in the Church, it has long-since ended. Church leaders sought divine guidance regarding the issue and more than three decades ago extended the priesthood to all worthy male members. The Church immediately began ordaining male members to priesthood offices wherever they attended throughout the world.

The Church unequivocally condemns racism, including any and all past racism by individuals both inside and outside the Church. In 2006, then Church president Gordon B. Hinckley declared that “no man who makes disparaging remarks concerning those of another race can consider himself a true disciple of Christ. Nor can he consider himself to be in harmony with the teachings of the Church. Let us all recognize that each of us is a son or daughter of our Father in Heaven, who loves all of His children.”

## **Why do you “baptize for the dead”?**

Jesus Christ taught that “except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Proxy baptism for the deceased is a free will offering by Latter-day Saints for those who have passed on without receiving the ordinance of baptism. According to Church doctrine, a departed soul in the afterlife is completely free to accept or reject such a baptism — the offering is freely given and must be freely received. The ordinance does not force deceased persons to become members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, nor does the Church list deceased persons as members of the Church. In short, there is no change in the religion or heritage of the recipient or of the recipient's descendants — the notion of coerced conversion is utterly contrary to Church doctrine.

All Church members are instructed to submit names for proxy baptism only for their own deceased relatives as an offering of familial love.

## **Why does the Church send out missionaries?**

The missionary effort of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is based on the New Testament pattern of missionaries serving in pairs, teaching the gospel, and baptizing believers in the name of Jesus Christ. More than 80,000 missionaries, most of whom are under the age of 25, are serving missions for the Church at any one time. Missionary work is voluntary, with most missionaries funding their own missions. They receive their assignment from Church headquarters and are sent only to countries where governments allow the Church to operate. In some parts of the world, missionaries are sent to serve only humanitarian or other specialized missions.

## **Why don't Mormons smoke or drink alcohol?**

The health code for Latter-day Saints is based on a teaching regarding foods that are healthy and substances that are not good for the human body. Accordingly, alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee and illegal drugs are forbidden. A 14-year UCLA study, completed in 1997, tracked mortality rates and health practices of 10,000 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in California, indicating that Church members who adhered to the health code had one of the lowest death rates from cancer and cardiovascular disease in the United States. It also found that Church members who followed the code had a life expectancy eight to 11 years longer than the general white population of the United States.



## **What is the position of the Church regarding same-sex marriage?**

For Latter-day Saints, marriage between a man and a woman is sacred. The document “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” states that “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.”

Though The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not support same-sex marriage, it firmly believes that all people are equally beloved children of God and deserve to be treated with love and respect. Furthermore, the Church has advocated for rights of same-sex couples regarding hospitalization and medical care, fair housing and employment rights, or probate rights, so long as these do not infringe on the integrity of the traditional family or the constitutional rights of churches. In Salt Lake City, for example, the Church supported ordinances aimed at protecting gay residents from discrimination in housing and employment.

### **Same-Sex Attraction**

Few topics are as emotionally charged or require more sensitivity than same-sex attraction. This complex matter touches on the things we care about most: our basic humanity, our relationship to family, our identity and potential as children of God, how we treat each other, and what it means to be disciples of Christ.

The Church’s doctrinal position is clear: Sexual activity should occur only between a man and a woman who are married. However, that should never be used as justification for unkindness.

The experience of same-sex attraction is a complex reality for many people. The official stance of the Church is that the attraction itself is not a sin, but acting on it is. Even though individuals do not choose to have such attractions, they do choose how to respond to them. With love and understanding, the Church reaches out to all God’s children, including our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters.

The Church has created an official website to more fully address this complex issue – see [www.mormonsandgays.org](http://www.mormonsandgays.org).

## A Brief Bibliography of Resources about the Church of Christ of Latter-day Saints

Compiled by the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations.

### Official LDS sources

- [www.mormon.org](http://www.mormon.org)
  - official, church-run site dedicated to showing who Mormon people are, through brief biographies and descriptions of beliefs and values
- [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org)
  - official, church-run site focused more on the Church itself and its teachings
  - Includes full texts of all four LDS scriptural books, along with study helps
- [www.mormonnewsroom.org](http://www.mormonnewsroom.org)
  - information and resources for media who report on the LDS church
- [www.deseretbook.com](http://www.deseretbook.com)
  - LDS bookstore's online store
- [www.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu](http://www.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu)
  - online home of BYU's Institute for Religious Scholarship

### Unofficial websites

- [www.mormonbeliefs.org](http://www.mormonbeliefs.org)
  - a Mormon response to current issues facing the Church and society
- [www.zionsbest.com/best25websites.html](http://www.zionsbest.com/best25websites.html)
  - listing of numerous other Mormon websites
- [www.fairmormon.org](http://www.fairmormon.org)
  - LDS apologetics website countering anti-Mormon claims
- [www.mormonthink.com](http://www.mormonthink.com)
  - attempt to provide accurate information on misunderstood aspects of Mormonism
- [sunstonemagazine.com](http://sunstonemagazine.com)
- [www.carm.org/mormonism](http://www.carm.org/mormonism)
  - evangelical apologetics ministry explaining why Mormonism is not Christian
- [www.utlm.org](http://www.utlm.org)
  - Utah ministry challenging Mormon history and doctrine
- [www.contenderministries.org/mormonism.php](http://www.contenderministries.org/mormonism.php)
  - series of articles challenging the notion that Mormons are Christians
- [www.waltermartin.com/mormon](http://www.waltermartin.com/mormon)
  - evangelical ministry explaining how Mormon beliefs (and other new religious movements) are distinct from Christian beliefs

### Books

- *Book of Mormon + The Doctrines and Covenants + Pearl of Great Price*
- *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction*, by Richard Lyman Bushman
- *Mormonism for Dummies*, by Jana Reiss
- *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise*, by Richard Ostling