

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



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*The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure
of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

Macmillan Publishing Company
New York

Maxwell Macmillan Canada
Toronto

Maxwell Macmillan International
New York Oxford Singapore Sydney



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themselves, or to receive secret words and signs, or to dress in special clothing; some suggest a ritual ring dance.

“Prayer rings” were also common in nineteenth-century Protestant revivals, and Freemasons of the period arranged themselves in circular formation around an altar, repeating in unison the received Masonic signs (*see* FREEMASONRY AND THE TEMPLE).

Despite these analogues, the LDS prayer circle is a distinctive ceremony, integrally connected with temple worship. The ceremony may have been introduced in May 1842, when Joseph Smith taught the endowment to several of his closest associates; and a prayer circle group was formed on May 26, 1843, with Joseph Smith as its leader. This prayer circle, referred to in many early records as the “Quorum of the Anointed,” to which others (including women) were gradually initiated, met and prayed together regularly during the last year of Joseph Smith’s life and continued after his martyrdom in June 1844 until endowments began to be performed in the Nauvoo Temple in December 1845.

Although deriving in all instances from temple worship, some prayer circles were formally organized apart from the endowment ceremony. Membership in these special prayer circles, which began in 1851 and continued until 1929, did not depend upon Church position. Other prayer circles were formed for priesthood groups: stake presidencies and high councils, priesthood quorums, ward bishoprics—all of them formed under the authority of the First Presidency and generally in response to specific requests. On May 3, 1978, the First Presidency announced that all prayer circles outside the temple were to be discontinued. Apart from the endowment ceremony, the only prayer circles still held are part of the weekly meeting of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve and the monthly meeting of all General Authorities in the Salt Lake Temple.

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GEORGE S. TATE

PREACHING THE GOSPEL

Prior to his ascension, the resurrected Savior charged his apostles to “teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20). This charge reiterates the call of Abraham (Abr. 2:6, 9–11) and has been unequivocally renewed in the latter days (D&C 110:12): “And the voice of warning shall be unto all people” (D&C 1:4). “This calling and commandment give I unto you concerning all men . . . [they] shall be ordained and sent forth to preach the everlasting gospel among the nations” (D&C 36:4–5). “For, verily, the sound must go forth from this place unto all the world, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth—the gospel must be preached unto every creature, with signs following them that believe” (D&C 58:64). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints responds to this charge by sending missionaries to people of all persuasions throughout the world (*see* MISSIONS).

The calling to preach the gospel has a distinctive meaning among Latter-day Saints. All who are in the Church are directly or indirectly indebted to missionaries for their introduction to the gospel. Historically, missionary labor has been carried out by members of the Church who have gone “two by two” (D&C 42:6; 52:10; cf. Luke 10:1; John 8:17) into every land and clime of the free world (*see* MISSIONARY, MISSIONARY LIFE). LDS missionary labor is not a profession or vocation. It is voluntary and unpaid. The majority of those who presently serve for an average of two years are young men and women, but many older couples of various professions or walks of life also serve. MISSION PRESIDENTS are themselves laymen called to serve usually for three years. At this writing (1991), some 40,000 LDS full-time missionaries are serving.

In addition, there are other modes of preaching the gospel. Members may be called to fulfill stake missions that are coordinated in time spent with their regular occupations or professions. They devote about ten hours per week (usually evenings) to missionary work in their own stake area. The “Every member a missionary” program emphasized by President David O. MCKAY involves members inviting friends or interested persons into their homes for discussions of gospel principles. A General Missionary Fund is maintained by member contributions, which help some persons

in undeveloped countries to supplement their savings and serve full-time missions. Whether laboring at home or abroad, Latter-day Saints are constantly admonished that the witness and testimony of the gospel are only effective if they reflect genuine and continual discipleship of Jesus Christ. The gospel is to be taught in mildness and in meekness, in demonstration of the Spirit, and in love unfeigned (D&C 38:41; 99:2; 121:41).

The command of the Lord to preach the gospel to all nations has a twofold purpose: to bring people to an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and also to sound the warning voice to leave mankind without excuse (*see* VOICE OF WARNING).

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PREDESTINATION

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints rejects the belief in predestination—that God predetermines the salvation or the damnation of every individual. The gospel teaches that genuine human freedom and genuine responsibility—individual AGENCY in both thought and action—are crucial in both the development and the outcome of a person's life. Church doctrine rejects the strict dual option providing only heaven or hell as an outcome, since people vary widely in their levels of spiritual attainment. At the same time, Latter-day Saints recognize both the indispensable need for the grace of God manifested through Jesus Christ and the effective spiritual guidance that comes through divine FOREORDINATION.

The LDS position is based in part on the teachings of Paul that God “will render to every man according to his deeds” and that “there is no



California Mission meeting by the Cliff House, near San Francisco, May 1897, Mission President Ephraim H. Nye speaking. Latter-day Saints strive to preach the gospel in every land, in every place, and to every person.