

Guideline Responses to Common Questions

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These guidelines are for the use of Church leaders and Public Affairs representatives in response to questions that may be asked by opinion leaders or the news media in the course of normal Church outreach. They may also be useful in responding to questions from Church members. They are simply guidelines when short responses are required, and should not be considered as formal, official statements that must be used word-for-word. They may be updated from time to time.

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Topics	Page
Common Doctrinal Questions	
a. Are Mormons Christian?	2
b. The Book of Mormon	2
c. Modern Prophets	2
d. Do You Worship a Different Jesus?	3
e. Do You Believe in the Trinity?	3
f. Do You Believe in Grace?	3
g. Do You Believe You Can Become Gods?	3
h. Will You Have Your Own Planet?	3
h. Do You Believe in Heaven and Hell?	3
i. Are Jesus and Satan Brothers?	4
j. Was the Garden of Eden in Missouri?	4
k. Why No Tea and Coffee?	4
Abuse	5
Affinity Fraud	6
Church Discipline	7
Church Finances	9
Clannish Nature of Church Members	11
Dissent	12
Hard-to-Believe Events in Church History	13
Immigration	14
Missionaries, Growth of the Church	15
Political Influence	16
Political Neutrality	17
Polygamy	19
Popular Culture	20
Prominent Members and their Views	21
Race	22
Religious freedom	24
Revelation and Living Prophets	25
Same-sex Attraction	26
a. Same-sex Marriage and Proposition 8	27
b. Gay suicide	29
c. Aversion Therapy	30
Temples	31
a. Temples: Covenants and Consecration	32
b. Temples: Symbolism and Secrecy	33
c. Temples: Baptism for the Dead	34
d. Temple Garments	35
The United States Constitution	36
Welfare and Humanitarian Aid	37
Women in the Church	38
Worship Services	39

Common Doctrinal Questions

Question: *What do Latter-day Saints believe and how are they different?*

Primary message:

Latter-day Saints follow the teachings of Jesus Christ by trying to live the way He taught. In that respect, we have much in common with faithful members of other Christian churches. In addition, we have distinctive teachings and new scripture from modern prophets in the past 180 years that have expanded our understanding of God's purposes for us here on earth and beyond.

Support:

The following brief points may be used to respond to the most common questions:

- **Are Mormons Christian?** Yes. Latter-day Saints worship Jesus Christ as the Son of God and embrace His message, mission, and ministry as set out in the New Testament. In addition, The Book of Mormon is another testament, or witness, of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Christ-centered references occur throughout the book, such as in 2 Nephi 25:26: *"And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins."*
- **The Book of Mormon:** God has provided additional scripture within the past two centuries to guide His children. The Book of Mormon is an ancient religious text giving a second witness of Christ. Other volumes of scripture include the writings of Moses and Abraham, and modern prophets. Church members use all of these books as well as the Bible as their scriptural foundation.
- **Modern prophets:** The Church is governed today by apostles, reflecting the way Jesus organized his Church in Bible times. Three apostles constitute the First Presidency, and together with a council of twelve other apostles have responsibility for the Church worldwide. Each

is accepted by Church members in a prophetic role corresponding to the apostles in the Bible.

- **Do you worship a different Jesus?** Latter-day Saints worship God the Father and Jesus Christ--the Jesus of the Bible that many people are familiar with.
- **Do you believe in the Trinity?** We believe in God the Father, and his Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost (or Holy Spirit). In many Christian traditions, these are usually understood as manifestations of one God. In our belief, they are separate personages but one in purpose.
- **Do you believe in grace?** Yes. We believe God's grace is what ultimately saves us yet we must do all we can to live God's commandments and follow Jesus Christ's teachings. We do not believe salvation comes by simply confessing belief in Christ as our Savior. Faith, works, ordinances, and grace are all necessary.
- **Do you believe you can become gods?** Latter-day Saints believe that we are all sons and daughters of God, and that all of us have the potential to grow both during and after this life to become more like him. As the Bible teaches, this is God's work—to help us grow to what he calls exaltation, a state in which the faithful will be heirs to everything God has promised to his Son, Jesus Christ. This is one of the most profoundly significant doctrines of the Church—we live together as families and continue to learn and progress after we die.
- **Will you have your own planet?** Assertions that Mormons will each have their own planet in the next life are commonly found in anti-Mormon writings which often fail to give context. We believe what the Bible teaches - that the faithful will be heirs to everything that God has promised to his Son, Jesus Christ (see Romans 8:16-17; Galatians 4:7; and Philippians 2:5-6). Few people now living can contemplate the enormous blessings in store for all men and women who faithfully keep God's commandments.
- **Do you believe in heaven and hell?** The popular understanding of heaven as a place of eternal rest, and hell as a place of eternal punishment is not sufficient for Latter-day Saints. Rather, through

God's grace, our actions in this life determine where we dwell in the next life. Heaven is living in God's presence with our families and continuing to grow. To Latter-day Saints, hell means being blocked in our progress and being separated from God and those we love because of the choices made during mortality. Everyone will be resurrected, however.

- **Are Jesus and Satan brothers?** Jesus and Satan are polar opposites. Jesus is the resurrected divine Son of God. Satan is a fallen spirit. All of us are children of God, and therefore all are brothers and sisters.
- **Was the Garden of Eden in Missouri?** Strictly speaking, we do not know where the Garden of Eden was. Joseph Smith established a settlement called Adam-ondi-Ahman in Daviess County, Missouri. While not an important or foundational doctrine, Latter-day Saints believe that Adam and Eve dwelt in that area after being expelled from the Garden of Eden.
- **Why no tea and coffee?** Latter-day Saints believe in keeping themselves healthy. For that reason, and in obedience to divine revelation, we abstain from tea and coffee, tobacco and alcohol and follow other principles designed to maintain health. These health principles have undoubtedly contributed in a major way to longevity of our Church members, which is well documented.

Abuse

Sample question:

The Church has been sued in child abuse cases. What does the Church do to protect its members from abuse?

Primary message:

The Church has a zero-tolerance policy toward abuse or cruelty of any kind to children or spouses.

Support

- One of the great maladies of our society is the prevalence of abuse of children or spouses. The fact that abuse often occurs within families which should be a haven of safety and trust is especially tragic.
- No other church takes the steps we do to prevent or address abuse. Local leaders are frequently instructed on how to recognize and prevent abuse. The Church's "Handbook of Instructions" for lay leaders provides clear direction for helping victims and handling those suspected of abuse. The Church maintains a 24-hour help line of counselors and legal specialists for leaders who have questions about reporting or responding to abuse.
- The Church sees its first responsibility as helping those who have been abused and protecting those who may be vulnerable to future abuse.
- Church policy directs that abusers be dealt with promptly. They are encouraged to promptly report their activities to appropriate law enforcement authorities, both to remove the likelihood of further abuse and to provide abusers with the help they need.
- Abusers are subject to internal Church discipline as well as criminal prosecution. Depending on the nature of the offense, they may lose their Church membership altogether.
- In cases of known child abuse an abuser can never hold responsibilities involving children or young adults.
- For more information, visit <http://newsroom.lds.org/official-statement/child-abuse>

Affinity Fraud

Sample question:

Some Mormons have been found guilty of affinity fraud, and it seems to be more common among your congregations. Are your people more susceptible to affinity fraud because of the closeness of your congregations?

Primary message:

People who perpetrate affinity fraud target trusting communities, which is what makes it such a perverse crime. Groups and congregations of many different faiths may be especially susceptible. Church leaders are vigilant in watching for any type of fraud and have repeatedly warned members to exercise caution and wisdom in financial matters.

Support

- Past warnings by leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have sent a clear message to members about the danger of affinity fraud. This admonition given by worldwide leaders of the Church is frequently repeated at the local level both in congregational instruction and in counsel given to individuals and families by local lay leaders.
- Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints place a high value on personal honesty. Those who carry out these scams can be expected to lose their Church membership as well as face criminal prosecution.

Church Discipline

Sample question:

What does it mean when someone is excommunicated from the Church?

Primary message:

God loves all His children. Removing a person's Church membership is a course of last-resort taken only when less serious disciplinary measures are insufficient. Readmission is encouraged for those willing to abide by the teachings of the Church.

Support

- A person's membership in the Church may be canceled when members are guilty of child abuse, incest, fraud or other serious crimes. Practicing or advocating polygamy also warrants loss of Church membership.
- Church members who no longer wish to associate with the Church may have their membership record canceled at their request. However, simple lapse of activity in the Church is not something that prompts Church discipline.
- Those who have lost their membership may continue to attend Church services, but unlike other members are not able to preach or pray from the pulpit.
- Withdrawal of membership has several purposes, including protection of the innocent (as in the case of abuse of other Church members) and protecting the integrity of the Church. However, it also provides a pathway for repentance and rehabilitation for the Church member who has transgressed. After sincere repentance, those involved in serious transgressions may be re-baptized and resume their Church activities.
- Other forms of Church discipline may be applied when a member's offense does not warrant loss of membership. Such actions might include temporary removal of certain privileges of membership, such as suspension of a person's ability to partake of the sacrament.
- When required, Church discipline is administered by local leaders who are generally familiar with the individual and his or her

circumstances. Appeals may be made to higher Church authorities if the member feels a decision is unfair, but such appeals are unusual.

Church Finances

Sample question:

Why won't the Church publicly share its financial reports and information?

Primary message:

The great majority of the Church's income is derived from the voluntary contributions of its members. Through the principle of tithing, faithful members contribute a tenth of their income to the work of the Church. The Church's finances are regularly and independently audited.

Support

- The Church treats the details of its finances as confidential. However, expenditures fall into five major categories:
 - Providing buildings or places of worship for members around the world (we have thousands of such buildings and continue to open more, sometimes several in a week).
 - Education programs, including support for our universities and our seminaries and institutes.
 - The Church's worldwide missionary program.
 - The operation of nearly 140 temples, and administration of the world's largest family history program.
 - Our humanitarian aid and welfare programs, which serve nonmembers as well as members.
- The income for all of these expensive programs comes almost entirely from the voluntary contributions of Church members. The Church is grateful for the faithfulness of its members in consistently funding these worldwide operations.
- The vast majority of the Church's leadership around the world is through voluntary service, including some 30,000 bishops and branch leaders who oversee our congregations. Therefore, the Church is able to use funds that would otherwise be used for salaries to bless the lives of its members everywhere.
- A relatively small number of leaders are called to full-time service as "General Authorities" and are required to give up their full-time jobs outside the Church. Those who are expected to serve until they are age 70 receive an allowance sufficient for them to support themselves

and their immediate families during their time of service. It is not possible to become wealthy by serving in senior Church ministries—in fact, many senior leaders' incomes drop significantly when they are called to full-time Church service.

- All funds given to the Church by its members are considered sacred. They are voluntary offerings that represent the faith and dedication of members, and are used with careful oversight and discretion. They are audited regularly by independent, certified auditors.
- Responsibility for oversight and administration of the Church's finances rests with a council of the Church's most senior leaders. No one individual has that responsibility. In its entire history, the Church has never had to deal with misappropriations of funds by its senior leaders.

Clannish Nature of Church Members

Sample question: *Mormons seem to keep to themselves, and have a reputation of being clannish. Why?*

Primary message:

Latter-day Saints as a group are an open and friendly people. We invite anyone with the perception that we are otherwise to get to know us better.

Support

- Our worship and beliefs foster a closeness among members. We often refer to each other as brothers and sisters. It's this same closeness that attracts thousands of people to the Church each year. This should never be mistaken for exclusivity. Latter-day Saints are fully integrated into their broader communities wherever they are in the world.
- Because the Church operates with a lay ministry, almost every active Church member is involved in service of some kind. This can occupy significant time, and is sometimes the reason that Church members may seem preoccupied with their Church service rather than community involvement. Such community involvement is encouraged, however.
- The best way to get to know us is to talk to a Church friend or neighbor or work associate. Most Church members are more than happy to engage in conversations about their faith. Our Sunday worship services are also open to everyone.

Dissent

Sample question:

Outsiders sometimes get the impression that Mormons are overly strict, rigid in their beliefs and tolerate no dissent. Haven't some been excommunicated for publicly disagreeing with the Church?

Primary message:

The right to choose for oneself is an inherent right of all men and women and a central doctrinal principle in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Support

- Members of the Church live in a wide variety of political, social, and economic conditions and contribute a broad range of perspectives and experiences in class or group discussions, or in talks from the pulpit.
- The remarkable degree of doctrinal solidarity in the Church stems from a shared understanding that its principles have been established by revelation. While Church members may have different views on one principle or another, it is rare for dissent to arise over core doctrines.
- If members did preach doctrines contrary to those taught by the Church, it is likely they would be counseled by their local congregational leader. Church discipline applies only in exceptional cases in which a Church member deliberately teaches false doctrine after being corrected, publicly attacks the Church and its leaders, or encourages others to do so.
- Education is highly valued in the Church. All Church members are encouraged to study for themselves and develop their own convictions about Jesus Christ and his teachings, rather than rely on others.
- Joseph Smith said that one of the grand fundamental principles of our faith is “to receive truth, let it come from whence it may.”

Hard-to-Believe Events in Church History

Question: *Why should people believe far-fetched accounts of angels and gold plates in the 19th century?*

Primary message:

- Millions of people around the world believe that God restored the ancient Church through revelations and manifestations to Joseph Smith and others in the 1800s.

Support

- Their conviction is based on answers to their personal prayers, on careful reading and studying of the scriptures, the goodness they see in the lives of Church members and in the constantly reinforced spiritual promptings they receive in their own lives. The great message of the Church is that God truly has once again spoken to mankind in our day.
- If God once spoke to men and women through revelations, including angelic appearances as the Bible records, there is no reason why he should not do so again. A foundational message of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that he has done so.
- The most powerful element of conviction for many members of the Church comes from their belief in The Book of Mormon. The book itself invites the reader to pray and ask sincerely, in the name of Jesus Christ, if it is true. It is the answers to those prayers that convince many people that the book is what it claims to be—another witness for Jesus Christ, a companion to the Bible and a volume of sacred scripture.
- Those who willingly embrace the biblical accounts of the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus Christ—accounts which we also embrace—should have no problem with Latter-day Saint acceptance of revelation in the 1800's.

Immigration

Sample question:

What is the Church's position on illegal immigration?

Primary messages:

- In common with most citizens of the United States, the Church recognizes the necessity of securing the country's borders against illegal immigration.
- Meanwhile, the Church has urged a "responsible and compassionate approach" to dealing with the reality that millions of undocumented immigrants are already in the country who are working in jobs and supporting their families.

Support

- While recognizing the need to secure national borders, the Church urges that attention be paid to principles of "loving our neighbors" and keeping families intact when dealing with undocumented immigrants.
- The Church supported the *Utah Compact* – a set of principles developed by a range of community leaders – because it reflected the Church's concerns that immigration reform should be more than just punitive measures.

Missionaries, Growth of the Church

Sample question:

Why do you send missionaries to Christian nations, and why do missionaries insist on door-knocking when most people consider that an invasion of privacy?

Primary message:

Missionaries go throughout the world, two-by-two, in the pattern established by Jesus Christ himself in order to teach about Jesus, serve others, and to improve their lives. Millions of people today are grateful for their unselfish service because of the improvement it has brought to their own lives.

Support

- The Church and its missionaries fully appreciate that not everyone likes to be approached on their doorstep. In fact, our missionaries have a worldwide reputation for being polite. If missionaries from the Church ever fall short of that high standard, we would want to be the first to know.
- In some cultures where door knocking is wholly unaccepted, our missionaries find alternative ways to meet people.
- Missionaries are unpaid. They do what they do because of their personal conviction that what they have to offer provides a pathway to true happiness in this life and the next.
- Door knocking is only one way in which missionaries find people interested in what they have to say. Many people ask for missionaries after visiting Mormon.org. Others become interested in the Church through friends or relatives who are members.
- Church growth indicates the success of the Church's missionary efforts. More than 14 million people now constitute the Church's membership.
- Church members worldwide participate in sharing the gospel. The worldwide growth of the Church is partly due to the service of more than 50,000 full-time, volunteer missionaries, but this tells only half the story. The sharing of their beliefs by members with their friends and acquaintances is a significant factor in Church growth.

Political Influence

Sample questions:

Since most state legislators in Utah are Mormons, the Church dominates Utah politics. Would the Church similarly try to influence a Mormon President of the United States?

Primary message:

The Church's focus is on administering the Church worldwide and inviting people everywhere to come to Christ. Interactions with government on substantive issues are relatively rare.

Support

- There are large numbers of Church members in Utah and some other intermountain states. Those elected to public office at every level, from school board to governor, reflect these demographics.
- The Church does not tell legislators who are Church members how to vote.
- In a typical Utah legislative session, the Church makes formal representations through its registered lobbyists on about 1 per cent of all bills before the legislature.
- The Church does reserve the right to add its voice to the public square by speaking out from time to time on important issues, particularly those with moral or ethical implications for society. In so doing, it often works with other like-minded citizens—for example, on the matter of illegal immigration.
- Elected officials who are Latter-day Saints—ranging from Senator Harry Reid to Senator Orrin Hatch—are expected to make their own decisions based on their best judgment and with consideration of the constituencies whom they were elected to represent.

Political Neutrality

Sample questions:

What is the Church's position on political parties? Why are most Church members in the United States Republican?

Primary message:

The Church's mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, not to elect persons to public office. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is neutral in matters of party politics in all of the many nations in which it is established.

Support

- Church members **individually decide which political candidates and parties best represent their own ideas of good government.**
- The Church does NOT:
 - Endorse, promote or oppose political parties, their platforms or candidates.
 - Allow its church buildings, membership lists or other resources to be used for partisan political purposes.
 - Try to tell its members which party or candidate to vote for.
 - Attempt to direct or dictate policy to a government leader.
- The Church DOES:
 - Speak out in a nonpartisan way on some important issues that it believes have significant community or moral consequences or that directly affect the interests of the Church or its members' practice of their beliefs, such as immigration or the protection of marriage.
 - Encourage its members to play a role as responsible citizens in their communities, including becoming informed about issues and voting in elections.
 - Expect its members to engage in the political process in an informed and civil manner, respecting the fact that members of the Church come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences and may have differences of opinion in partisan political matters.

- Request candidates for office not to imply that the Church endorses their candidacy or platforms.

Polygamy

Sample question:

What is the Church's connection with polygamy?

Primary message:

The Book of Mormon teaches that monogamy is God's standard and is modified only at his direction (Jacob 2:23-31). Polygamy was practiced by the Church in the nineteenth century, but was officially discontinued over a century ago in 1890. Since that time the Church has taught that entering into polygamous marriages is against the will of God and the law of the land. Polygamists are not allowed to be members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Support

- Groups practicing polygamy today are not members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and are not affiliated with it in any way.
- Popular culture and the news media sometimes mistakenly depict polygamous groups, usually in the western United States or western Canada, as "Mormons" or Latter-day Saints.

If asked about polygamy in the next life

- We can speak authoritatively about polygamy in this life. However, concerning those who have legally married more than one spouse, including those whose partners have died and remarried, we can be sure that a loving Heavenly Father knows how to bless everyone's life and that our individual choices will be respected.

Popular Culture

Sample question:

How does the Church feel about the recent rise in attention it is receiving in popular culture, especially from productions like “The Book of Mormon” musical and other Broadway plays, or HBO’s “Big Love” and TV reality shows?

Primary message:

People understand that popular entertainment is not reality. Rather than worry about various forms of entertainment that have only fleeting relevance, our sights remain firmly focused on the gospel of Jesus Christ and the permanent improvement that can bring to people’s lives.

Support

- As the Church continues to grow, it will inevitably attract more attention from popular culture.
- We share in good humor when well-intentioned.
- Church members as a group avoid entertainment that has questionable taste, foul language or sexually explicit material, choosing to give their attention to those things that the apostle Paul called “lovely,” “praiseworthy” and “of good report.”
- The Church does not usually comment on how it is portrayed in fictional books, movies, plays or other entertainment media.

Prominent Members and Their Views

Sample question:

Do people like Glenn Beck, Senator Harry Reid, or various candidates for high offices and various Mormon bloggers speak for the Church?

Primary message:

Like most faiths, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints embraces a diverse membership with a wide range of views. These members are free to express themselves publicly, but they speak only for themselves and not authoritatively for the Church.

Support

- Only the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, or those they designate, speak for the entire Church on matters of doctrine and policy.
- The Church recognizes that Latter-day Saints who hold political office must represent their constituencies, and may take public positions not embraced by the Church.
- The advent of the Internet has given many Latter-day Saints access to media such as blogs, some of which attract significant followings. Such members typically draw on their own insights and experiences, which may or may not be consistent with Church teachings. Anyone in doubt about official Church positions, doctrines or policies should refer to official Church websites or sources.

Race

Sample question:

The Church has a reputation of having elements of racism, especially towards Blacks. Why?

Primary message:

God makes no distinction between the races as to the worth of a human soul, and neither does the Church.

Support

- The Church's worldwide membership is extremely diverse, and worldwide Church leadership reflects that diversity.
- Our congregations are based on locality—people attend church at the chapel which serves their residential area. Consequently, our congregations have never at any time been segregated by race.
- Race has never been recorded on Church membership records in the entire history of the Church.

If asked:

- While members of all races have always qualified for baptism, an early direction of the Church restricted those of African origin from holding the priesthood.
- The origins of the practice are obscure, but prophets taught that at some point the priesthood would be given to all worthy males in the Church.
- Some explanations with respect to this matter were made in the absence of direct revelation and references to these explanations are sometimes cited in publications. These previous personal statements do not represent Church doctrine.
- Beginning in the early 1970s, Church leaders sought divine guidance, and in 1978, a revelation to the Church's prophet extended the blessings of the priesthood to all worthy members.
- The 1978 announcement was a day long-awaited by leaders and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was a day of great rejoicing. Since that time the Church has experienced

some of its most robust growth in Africa and racially diverse areas of the United States and Latin America.

Religious Freedom

Question?

Religious freedom is getting increasing attention and becoming the subject of more and more public debate. What is the position of your Church on religious freedom?

Primary message:

Religious freedom is a fundamental human right widely recognized by national and international laws. It incorporates the rights of religious organizations as well as individual religious people, and the right to act as well as to believe. The Church honors and supports religious freedom. It becomes concerned whenever religious liberties are eroded or violated.

Support

- The Church recognizes that religious freedom is essential for the health of a diverse society and to help people with deep differences live together in peace. Protecting this freedom serves both those of faith and those of no faith.
- Religious freedom is endangered in many places throughout the world. It is also being threatened in the United States by social and legal developments that challenge the freedoms of religious people and organizations in matters of health care, employment, and speech, among others. This is an issue of deep concern to the Church and to other groups.
- Because of the Church's teachings and history, Church members have a special commitment to religious freedom. The Church has taught the importance of religious freedom since its origins. From a history that has sometimes involved religious persecution, Latter-day Saints have developed a great appreciation for religious liberty.
- In discussions of religious freedom, as with others, the Church encourages civil and reasonable discourse despite disagreements.

Revelation and Living Prophets

Sample questions:

Do Church members all have to walk in lockstep with leaders because they believe revelation comes top-down? Are your prophets infallible?

Primary message:

Revelation is open to everyone. When we speak to God, we refer to that as prayer. When he responds to us through the influence of the Holy Spirit, we refer to that as revelation.

Support

- Church members have enormous respect for their leadership in the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles, and other leaders known as “General Authorities.” Appointments to these positions come from the president of the Church and invariably reflect many years of faithful devotion and sacrifice.
- The word “infallible” is not used in the Church. Church members respect the right given to modern apostles and prophets to declare doctrine and determine policies for the Church. Church members understand that leaders seek the Lord’s guidance and inspiration in these decisions, and support them in those efforts.
- Revelation for the entire Church comes to the First Presidency and the Twelve. Revelation comes to ordinary members in answer to prayer in personal matters. These might include their own Church responsibilities, as well as family, education, choice of career, and dealing with life’s daily difficulties and opportunities.

Same-sex Attraction

Sample question:

What is the Church's attitude toward homosexuality?

Primary message:

God loves all of His children, and Church membership and fellowship are open to all.

Support

- All Church members are asked to live in accordance with God's commandments. Chastity and fidelity are required of all members, regardless of sexual orientation. The blessings of full fellowship and service are available to any who are willing to live according to the beliefs and doctrines of the Church.
- The Church teaches that sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman is sinful.
- The Church is opposed to same-sex marriage (see separate topic).
- The Church distinguishes between feelings or inclinations and behavior. The Church recognizes that some of its members are attracted to others of the same sex, and experience deep emotional, social and physical feelings.
- Those in the Church who are attracted to someone of the same sex but stay faithful to the Church's teachings enjoy full fellowship including attending and serving in temples, and ultimately receive all the blessings afforded to those who live the commandments of God.
- Feelings toward those who are attracted to the same sex should never be used as justification for unkindness. Jesus Christ, whom we follow, was clear in His condemnation of sexual immorality, but never cruel. His interest was always to lift the individual, never to tear them down.

See also:

Same-sex marriage and Proposition 8

Gay suicide

Reparative or Aversion Therapy

Same-sex Marriage and Proposition 8

Sample question:

Why did the Church invest so much time and money in Proposition 8 to take away the rights of a persecuted minority?

Primary messages:

- Our involvement in Proposition 8 is born out of our defense of traditional marriage. The divine and eternal purposes of the family are central to our doctrine and at the very core of our purpose and existence here on earth.
- We recognize people hold many different views on this issue. The four largest churches in the U.S., with 100 million members in total, are all opposed to same-sex marriage. The Church's position on same-sex marriage and Proposition 8 are fully addressed on our newsroom website at newsroom.lds.org.

Support

- **Non-discrimination ordinances:** The Church strongly opposes same-sex marriage because it threatens to erode the traditional family. We have openly supported other rights for gays and lesbians such as protections from discrimination in matters of housing and employment—elements which do not threaten the family.
- **Slippery slope:** Giving same-sex marriage the legal and moral equivalency of traditional marriage has consequences far beyond marriage, including school curricula and the erosion of religious conscience under which those of opposing views are able to express their opinions.
- **Financial support:** The Church made no cash contribution to the Yes on 8 campaign. However, like other churches, we did call upon our members to participate. Their commitment—financial and otherwise—is a reflection of a strong desire to protect traditional, man-woman marriage.
- **Fined for campaign donations by the Fair Political Practices Commission:** Claims that the Church misrepresented contributions to the ProtectMarriage Coalition are false. There was a token fine for

a technicality, which is fully explained on our website. The Church did not donate money to Proposition 8.

- **Churches should stay out of political debates:** The Church is neutral in matters of party politics, platforms and candidates. It does reserve the right to speak out on important moral issues. This is entirely within the spirit and letter of civil law, which does not muzzle churches in expressing their views.
- **Support for civil unions:** As a Church, we have not specifically addressed the matter of civil unions. The Church's focus is on defending traditional marriage. Civil union proposals have varied content from state to state, and the Church has not chosen to issue a blanket statement on such proposals.
- **Possible ballot issue in 2012:** No official action has been taken to return this issue to California voters in 2012, and therefore the Church has not made any decision in relation to it.

Gay Suicide

Sample question:

What are you doing to respond to the high number of suicides among the gay youth of your Church?

Primary messages:

- As far as we are aware, there is no higher rate of suicide among the youth of our Church than among society in general.
- No one understands what ultimately leads someone to take his or her own life, but all can agree that even one loss of life is a tragedy. The Church does all it can to minister to the needs of its members, whatever they may be.
- We join our voice with others in unreserved condemnation of acts of cruelty or attempts to belittle or mock any group or individual that is different. Such actions simply have no place in our society.

Support

- Our Church members are especially sensitive to persecution and marginalization because of their understanding of our own early Church history. We hope members will be willing to speak out against bullying or intimidation whenever it occurs, including unkindness toward those who are attracted to others of the same sex.
- As a church, our doctrinal position is clear: any sexual activity outside of marriage is wrong, and we define marriage as between a man and a woman. However, that should never be used as justification for unkindness. Jesus Christ, whom we follow, was clear in His condemnation of sexual immorality, but always lifted the individual.
- Church leaders and members are available to help lift, support and encourage fellow members who wish to follow Church doctrine.
- God's universal fatherhood and love charges us to love one another. We are to treat each other with respect as brothers and sisters and fellow children of God, no matter how much we may differ from one another.

Aversion Therapy

Sample question:

Why did the Church support the barbaric practice of aversion therapy, by which gays were subjected to physical pain in clinics to divert their sexual attractions to the same sex.

Primary message:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has not, and does not now, recommend or sponsor such therapy.

Support:

- Clinical aversion techniques were attempted at a number of institutions in the United States in the late 1960s and early to mid 1970s to assist those who were distressed by unwanted sexual attractions as well as a broad range of emotional difficulties and addictions.
- Anchored to behavioral theory, unwanted attractions and behaviors were thought to decrease when followed by unpleasant stimuli like noise, unpleasant scents, nausea-inducing drugs or mild, electrical stimulation administered to the biceps muscle. These techniques were consistent with the ethical codes in place at the time.
- At Brigham Young University aversion techniques were used at the experimental laboratory of one professor of psychology and were discontinued in the 1970s. Most behaviorists no longer believe this is an appropriate treatment for those who are seeking change for unwanted same-gender attraction.
- Seeking counseling is a personal decision. Each person has the choice to bring his or her behavior in harmony with the moral standards of the Church.

Temples

Sample question:

What happens in Mormon temples?

Primary message:

Temples are not primarily places of congregational worship, but places of teaching and learning.

Support

- Elements that are common to Christian congregational worship – hymn singing, sermons, “communion” - are all found in Latter-day Saint chapels but not in temples. Temples are reserved for the highest sacraments of the faith.
- The three most significant temple sacraments for members are baptism for the dead, “endowment” and “sealing” ceremonies.
- For “baptisms for the dead,” see under “Temples: baptism for the dead.”
- The “endowment” refers to an endowment or gift of knowledge that the temple visitor receives by way of a presentation recounting the creation of the world, the experience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, their transgression and “fall” into mortality and their subsequent condition. The presentation teaches God’s plan of redemption through his son, Jesus Christ, who was sent to atone for the sins and enable the resurrection of all mankind
- An essential part of the endowment is a series of promises that the Church member makes to live his or her life in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ and the commandments of God (see Temples: covenants and consecration).
- The sealing ceremony unites a husband and wife in a marriage that lasts forever, and joins any children of the marriage to the parents in the same way
- These ceremonies are also commonly undertaken by Church members on behalf of deceased ancestors.

Temples: covenants and consecration

Sample question:

What particular promises do Mormons make in temples, and are any of them in conflict with ideals of citizenship, loyalty to nation or an oath of public office?

Primary message:

Promises made in the temple – often called “covenants” – are personal commitments made to God to follow the highest ideals of Christian living. There is absolutely no conflict with the promises made to God in the temple and loyalty or devotion to family, community and nation.

Support

- The temple experience is a deeply personal one for each participant. Since they consecrate their lives to God in the temple, each member on re-entering the world outside is expected to live in such a way that their lives reflect the highest Christian ideals.
- In the temple, we focus inwardly on our relationship to God. Outside the temple we serve others.
- An understanding of what it means to live a consecrated life is essential in any church that relies on its members rather than a salaried clergy. With some 30,000 congregations worldwide and hundreds of thousands of service positions, the Church simply could not operate unless members voluntarily accepted their sacred obligation to serve God by serving others. From bishops who spend many hours each week serving their flock, to the person who teaches children in the nursery, all service is highly valued in the Church.

Temples: symbolism and secrecy

Sample question:

Describe and explain Mormon temple rituals and an apparent fixation with secrecy.

Primary message:

In religious worship across the world, symbolism is a powerful method of teaching and remembering. Latter-day Saints use such symbols inside and outside the temples to reinforce their faith and remind them of promises made to God.

Church members do not regard the temple as *secret*, but they do reverence temples as the most *sacred* places on earth and therefore do not discuss temple worship casually even with each other outside the temple itself.

Support

- Religious traditions are replete with symbols to remind the participant of their significance. Familiar symbols in the Christian world are the rite of baptism by immersion (a symbolic cleansing from sin and of the burial and resurrection of Christ); the taking of the sacramental emblems as symbols of Christ's body and blood; the wearing of a crucifix or placing a fish sign on the window of a car.
- While we do not share the precise interpretation of all of these symbols used by our brothers and sisters in other Christian churches, we do respect them and those of other faiths, and hope that they will respect ours.
- In relation to symbolism within the temple, Latter-day Saints refrain from discussing details outside of the temple even among themselves. This helps preserve the sanctity of the temple and the feeling of holiness that Church members associate with it. Latter-day Saints take the sacredness of the temple very seriously, and consider casual or irreverent conversation about the temple to be one of the most serious violations of their religious obligations. Few members would ever use the term "secret" for something they regard as profoundly "sacred."

Temples: baptism for the dead

Sample question:

Why are Mormons baptized for dead people?

Primary message:

Jesus taught that baptism is essential for salvation (John 3:5), but that has prompted the age-old question on what happens to the billions of people who never have that opportunity. The answer lies in the doctrine of baptism for the dead, mentioned in the New Testament (see 1 Corinthians 15:29), but long lost to the Christian world.

Support

- At the heart of the practice of baptism for the dead is the Latter-day Saint sense of the universal love of God for all of his children, and the need for a plan to enable his sons and daughters to achieve their full potential.
- By standing in as proxy for someone who has died, a Church member may be baptized on behalf of that deceased person.
- A proxy baptism is an offering only. Obviously, such a gesture cannot make a person a member of the Church or a Christian in the next life. A person who has died retains the right in the next life to make choices, and is free to accept or reject the baptism performed in their behalf. In Latter-day Saint belief, acceptance of the baptismal rite opens the way to continued progression for the departed soul.
- Baptisms for the dead are performed only in temples.
- By Church policy, Church members may submit names for temple baptisms only if they are related, and if the person was born at least 105 years ago.
- The Church does not accept for baptism the names of celebrities or other prominent people unrelated to Church members. As a gesture of respect to the Jewish community and acknowledgment of the unprecedented nature of the Holocaust, the Church also does not accept the names of Jews who died as a result of those events in World War 2, unless requested by a direct descendant of that person. Such cases are rare.

Temple Garments

Sample question:

Why do Mormons wear special underwear?

Primary message:

In our world of diverse religious observance, many people of faith wear special clothing as a reminder of sacred beliefs and commitments. 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.

Support

- Temple garments serve as a personal reminder of covenants made with God to lead good, honorable Christ-like lives. The wearing of temple garments is an expression of an inward commitment to follow the Savior.
- The wearing of temple garments is also consistent with the general approach to modesty in dress followed by faithful Latter-day Saints, since wearing the garment and dressing immodestly are incompatible.
- *Historical background:* 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 (see Numbers 15: 37-41). Indeed, for some, religious clothing has always been an important part of integrating worship with daily living.
- Because of the personal and religious nature of the temple garment, the Church asks news media to report on the subject with respect, treating the 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.

The United States Constitution

Question: *Do Mormons believe the Constitution of the United States is a divinely-inspired document?*

Primary message:

Latter-day Saints consider the U.S. Constitution to be divinely inspired, and that America by divine design has provided the place where the ancient Church of Jesus Christ could be restored in modern times.

Support

- The establishment of the U.S. Constitution provided for the first time freedoms and protections that made the restoration of the Church possible. Despite the persecution of early members of the Church by their fellow Americans, the freedoms of speech, assembly and religion guaranteed within the U.S. Constitution were necessary for Joseph Smith and others to found The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- The Church respects the rule of law and constitutional government in every country, and its members adhere to those laws wherever they live.

If asked about the “White Horse Prophecy”

- A tradition, sometimes called the “White Horse Prophecy,” is based on unsubstantiated accounts and is not embraced as Church doctrine.
- We believe Americans of all faiths who benefit from the freedoms and protections of the Constitution have a personal obligation to study the principles of this singular document, and should unite to preserve it.

Welfare and Humanitarian Aid

Sample question: *The Church has a reputation of looking after its own, but what does it do for people who are not of your faith?*

Primary message:

Church members follow the example of Jesus Christ by doing what they can to serve others. We try to lift others spiritually, while also helping those who need economic help or to recover from natural disasters—whether or not they are members of our Church and regardless of their faith tradition or culture.

Support

- The Church administers a substantial, worldwide humanitarian relief program that provides disaster relief in emergencies, and then rehabilitation so that people who have suffered from major setbacks can regain their independence.
- Hundreds of other projects around the world attract Church support, often in partnership with other relief agencies and governments.
- The Church is especially active in providing safe drinking water for communities, training in neo-natal resuscitation, immunization programs and providing wheelchairs.
- Among Church members, the Church's well-established welfare program centers on helping people to help themselves.
- Church members are encouraged to be self-reliant, to seek good education and employment, and to prepare emergency food and other supplies for their families in case of unexpected hardship or need.
- Church members typically fast for two meals on the first Sunday of each month and donate the money saved to the Church to help fund its welfare program, which is administered by its local leaders.

Women in the Church

Sample question:

Why do women in the Church have a subordinate role to men?

Primary message:

God makes no distinction between men and women as to the worth of a human soul, and neither does the Church. The Book of Mormon teaches that “male and female” are “all alike unto God.”

Support

- Women as well as men give sermons from the pulpit, minister to others, lead congregations in prayers, teach groups of men and women, and sit in leadership councils.
- Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do not hold the priesthood, and do not therefore officiate in events like baptisms or marriages or serve as bishops. This reflects the pattern that Jesus Christ personally established in the Church of his day.
- Priesthood in the Church is not the same as in most other churches. Those ordained to the priesthood in local congregations are not paid for their services.
- **Like the societies in which they live, women of the Church are diverse.** They may be married, single, divorced or widowed. They may choose to stay at home with children, engage in professional careers, serve in their communities, or do a combination of any of these worthy pursuits. However, the Church teaches that there is no higher responsibility than nurturing children. Fathers and mothers are encouraged to make these determinations for themselves, carefully weighing their own circumstances.
- **Motherhood and the nurturing of children are held in special regard in the Church.** Our belief is that mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children, and that as equal partners with their husbands, they work to fulfill their divine roles related to the rearing of families.

Worship Services

Sample question:

Can anyone attend a Latter-day Saint church service, and what do church services look like?

Primary message:

Everyone is welcome to attend Church services, which are typically held on Sundays (except in a few countries where the Sabbath is observed on days consistent with the local culture).

Support

- Christians familiar with worship services will find much in common with Latter-day Saint worship, and a few things that are different.
- The primary worship service of 70 minutes consists of three or four hymns, brief prayers by a man or a woman at the beginning and end of the meeting, talks by members of the congregation, and the Latter-day Saint equivalent of communion, called the “the sacrament.”
- The style of service is much less formal than Roman Catholic services, or those of Protestant denominations such as Methodists and Episcopalians, but more formal than Pentecostal or other evangelical worship where hand clapping and audience response is common.
- There is no collection of money in our Church services, and no kneeling of the congregation.
- Talks by members of the congregation usually include one or two youth speakers, and two adults. All speak from the pulpit on gospel topics assigned in advance, and talks range from a couple of minutes to about 20 minutes.
- All prayers and talks close “in the name of Jesus Christ.” The sacramental emblems passed to the congregation on trays are bread and water, commemorating the body and blood of Christ.
- Families sitting together with their children are a common feature of Latter-day Saint worship services.
- Note: Sometimes it may be necessary to correct confusion between Sunday services and temple worship (see separate topic).

Changes since printing of Jan. 5, 2012:

1. Deletion of minor repetitive word on cover sheet.
2. Insertion of the second page (before contents page) dealing with taking control of interviews.
3. Replaced old temple garments response with new one.
4. Replaced title “Reparative and Aversion Therapy” with “Aversion Therapy.”
5. Inserted additional temple-related topics.
6. Made several wording changes suggested by Elder Oaks to the Temple topics.
7. Made small change to the finances page to reflect the fact that 2nd Quorum members do not receive an allowance, but without spelling that out.