

MORMON KINSHIP: THE SYMBOLIC SYSTEM OF FAMILY WITHIN MORMON  
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

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Kristeen Lee Black  
Drew University  
Madison, New Jersey  
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## ABSTRACT

Mormon Kinship: The Symbolic System of Family Within Mormon Religious Communities

Ph.D. Dissertation by  
Kristeen Lee Black

This dissertation explored the social structure of family within LDS congregations and argued that *ward families* are special types of kinship networks. *Ward families* are woven together by an ethic of care that enables their members to consider fellow congregants as family. Although this capacious idea and lived experience of family is in direct contrast to the official Church rhetoric of family as found in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” the phenomena of *ward families* illustrates how applying an extended and flexible idea of family in group settings produces caring and cohesive communities.

Within Mormonism a heteronormative model of family is a necessary part of Church doctrine and ritual, but it is not sufficient for creating cohesive communities. The findings in this study thereby challenge the argument that only a heteronormative model of family supports strong communities. Although maintaining kinship networks hinges upon recognizing others as kin, meaning some are left out, *ward families* are inclusive and able to recognize that they are part of a human family.

The ethic of care that binds *ward families* together is constructed through a combination of LDS doctrine, history, and bureaucratic form. The LDS doctrine of family includes embodied heavenly parents who beget humankind as spirit-children. LDS temple ritual enables generations of families to be bound together in the eternities, and Mormon doctrine claims that only those married in the temple will gain the highest level of heaven thereby making the family a necessary element in salvation and the afterlife.

Mormon pioneer history contains the practice of polygamy, an experimental model of family, and narratives of communities working together to build a new home in the West.

Throughout all of Mormon history, joining the LDS Church often means being alienated from one's biological family and friends, as such, fellow believers are often embraced as a surrogate family.

The LDS bureaucratic structure of lay leadership establishes callings that instill a duty to care for others. Service becomes an institutionally constructed disposition and a part of an LDS lifestyle--being a Mormon means serving God by serving others, and seeing humankind as kin.

For Otto Maduro.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Hymn #300: Families Can Be Together Forever, Through Heav'nly Father's Plan.<sup>1</sup>

*I ask "Emma," the woman seated across from me, how important the Church's emphasis on family is to her. Like most Mormons I pose this question to, she seems to respond immediately, not needing much, if any time at all, to reflect on the question before providing a response.<sup>2</sup> We had been sharing a meal, and casually chatting between bites. The conversation had been smooth and casual, but when I asked this question she suddenly became very serious, putting down her fork and laying both of her hands flat against the table. As she speaks her reply comes across as a deeply felt personal conviction spoken straight from her heart.*

*Emma: Greatly. The church is very wise in recognizing that the backbone of any stable society really comes within a stable family. If homes are not stable, if there isn't a good place for people to have a refuge from the world where they can be safe, mentored, loved and taught, the less stable societies in general will become. Because there isn't a place for them to crash, a place to land, a place to be loved, and a place to learn and heal from the damages caused by society. And because of that and because of our faith and belief and absolute knowledge of Jesus Christ and heavenly father, and know that they love us, and know that the family unit is the divine unit for eternity, they strongly emphasize families, and it's an eternal aspect. But the point is that without that bedrock, without that absolute conviction that the family is the central unit of society, and of our eternities, it would have been really easy to give up (on our marriage) a long time ago.<sup>3</sup>*

One of the hallmarks of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter referred to as the LDS Church or the Church and abbreviated as CJCLDS) is its focus on family which

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this work I will use a hymn from the LDS hymnbook as part of the chapter title to give the reader another sense of the way the theme of the chapter is contextualized in LDS settings. Many of the hymns used by the LDS Church have been borrowed from other religious traditions and denominations. This reflects, in part, the pastiche nature of the Church. LDS hymnbooks are used in LDS worship services, in the home, and for personal use. Hymn books can be purchased at most LDS bookstores, yet can also be accessed at no charge on the church's website at <http://www.lds.org/music/library/hymns?lang=eng>. The hymn used for this chapter reflects the theme of family in LDS doctrine. The chorus and title of LDS hymn #300 "Families Can Be Together Forever" (CJCLDS, 1985) point to the LDS belief that families are part of God's plan and extend into the afterlife. This particular hymn is often sung by children, yet its title has almost reached tag line status for the LDS Church and its members. You will find this saying "Families can be together forever" in a myriad of places: painted on plaques and hung in homes, embroidered on pillows, printed on everything from t-shirts to wedding announcements, in children's coloring books, etc.

<sup>2</sup> During the 2002 Olympics which were held in Salt Lake City, the LDS Church made efforts to move away from being referred to as "Mormon" and urged its followers, and members of the press, to refer to the Church by its full name; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Church also urged followers to call themselves LDS rather than Mormon. I have found, however, that members of the Church still use the term "Mormon" when referencing themselves and their church. Further, given that the Church's website Mormon.org features sections such as "I'm a Mormon," "Meet Mormons," and "Chat with a Mormon" may indicate that the Church recognizes that its followers are still most commonly known as Mormons and so continues to use that name. I will follow suit and use the term Mormon in my reference to both the LDS Church and its followers.

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview conducted June 30, 2012.

undergirds Mormon doctrine, ritual, and culture. The LDS Church's official description of family has been codified in the 1995 document "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" (hereafter referred to as "The Proclamation") (CJCLDS, 1995).<sup>4</sup> This document was generated by the Church's first presidency (the Church's president/prophet and his two counselors) and the Council of the Twelve and has been accepted by Mormons as if it were scripture.<sup>5</sup> "The Proclamation" declares that every person is a son or daughter of heavenly parents (heavenly father and heavenly mother), who has a divine nature and destiny and an eternal identity that includes gender. "The Proclamation" asserts that family and marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and is essential to happiness and salvation. The document legitimizes only a heteronormative model of family and warns that the disintegration of the family (and that model of family) will result in the demise of individuals, communities and nations. As reflected in this document and in the quote above, Mormons are among those who strongly believe that family is the cornerstone of their religious and social communities. For Mormons this means that topics of religious values, family, modernization (a perceived threat to the family unit), marriage and gender are all tightly interwoven.

Official Church rhetoric is laden with familial themes and Church programs are established in part to "strengthen the family," a frequent refrain (CJCLDS, 2006). Family is at the center of LDS temple ritual where families are "sealed" together for time and eternity, and early Church doctrine suggests that being the literal spirit-children of divine parents, all of humankind belongs to a "human family" (Smith, 1978, vol. 3:387). Modern Mormon rhetoric reflects the centrality of family, and it is very common for members of the Church of Jesus

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<sup>4</sup> A full discussion of the history of this document is presented in chapter five.

<sup>5</sup> The first presidency consists of the Church prophet/president and his two counselors. The council of the twelve is a modern LDS version of the twelve apostles.

Christ of Latter-day Saints to refer to their congregation (ward) as their *ward family*.<sup>6</sup> This strong emphasis on family prompted me to consider the possible connection the moniker *ward family* has with the Church's formal focus on family, and to discern if the naming of fellow congregants as family has an effect on congregational cohesiveness.<sup>7</sup>

Through careful study of Mormon doctrine, ritual, and the lived experience of the LDS tradition, this dissertation suggests that a focus on care, rather than a focus on family, is the crucial element in establishing congregations that are able to name their fellow congregants as family.<sup>8</sup> This work shows that it is only when Mormons extend the idea of family beyond the limited heteronormative model on which the Church focuses, to a much more capacious idea of family, can the element of care be implemented as an ethic of care.

This project is similar to other works which have cultural analysis as their focus, and is particularly influenced by cultural anthropologists and sociologists Mary Douglas, Robert Wuthnow, and Clifford Geertz. Influenced by Durkheim, Mary Douglas explored the patterns and structures that give concrete symbols their meaning (Douglas, 1996; 1982; Wuthnow et al. 1984:77-132). In a similar fashion, this work considers the patterns and structures of LDS doctrine, ritual, and rhetoric that give meaning to the concrete symbol of family in LDS contexts. This work also reflects the theories of sociologist Robert Wuthnow that suggests kindness,

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<sup>6</sup> LDS congregations are called wards, and the geographic area the congregation resides in is also called a ward. Sometimes this can get confusing, especially in Utah where people do not use the word congregation at all, and assume you know what they mean when they say "ward." Most often, one can infer which instance (congregation or area) is being referenced by the context, but sometimes it takes a well-trained ear to distinguish the difference. In this project I will make every effort to clarify how the term is being used so the reader is not left having to assume or guess at which instance is being referenced.

<sup>7</sup> Things like strong Church and congregational cohesiveness are difficult to measure; there is not a set of established parameters or elements necessary to prove that a congregation is cohesive. For this study I looked at how congregants were talking about their experiences within the ward and their connection (including emotive bonds) to fellow congregants as revealed in personal interviews as an indicator of a cohesive congregation.

<sup>8</sup> Care can be a very vague and subjective term, and one which we seldom define. For this paper I will be using the term care to refer to the ways that people nurture others and feel a sense of responsibility in being attentive to someone else's needs. While that does not clear up the subjective nature of the term, it seeing care as an emotive attentiveness that is executed in its most constructive and benevolent form helps us frame the initial context.



service, and acts of care towards others is something that must be institutionally shaped and individually interpreted (Wuthnow, 1995:7). The methodology for this project was shaped by Geertz who considers religion as a cultural system (Geertz, 1973); his participant/observation methodology greatly influenced my own approach to field research. A full discussion of the methodology used for this project as well as a description of the groups used in this study is provided in chapter two.

Although I visited several wards during the four years of field work this project encompassed, I chose two highly contrasting congregations to focus upon. One was in New Jersey, the other in Utah. I initially chose a congregation in New Jersey so I could begin field observation while still in residence at Drew University. Given that there are only 60 LDS congregations in New Jersey, as compared to 4,870 in Utah (CJCLDS, 2013f)<sup>9</sup> it soon became apparent that being in Utah would give me many more congregations to choose from. With a higher density of Mormons in Utah doing the bulk of my interviews there also offered me a rich look into the LDS culture. I will discuss the contrasting attributes of each of my focus congregations in chapter two.

In this chapter I give an outline of my argument and provide a brief introduction to the ethic of care, and Mormonism. I present my model for the symbolic system of family and discuss how the LDS focus has shifted from priesthood to family. Lastly, I introduce a few key terms that will help the reader navigate the presentation of research and findings in the remaining chapters. A full list of terms and their meanings is provided in the appendix.

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<sup>9</sup> Website <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics>) accessed August 17, 2013.

## Outline of the Argument

This dissertation considers the organized practices of both the collective (group) institution of Church, and the individual Church member to uncover the social structure of family within Mormon congregations and the process by which a congregation becomes a *ward family*. Taking a dialectical social constructionism approach utilizing the works of Durkheim, Bourdieu, and Geertz, this dissertation considered how a collective idea of being *ward family* is produced and then reproduces itself in LDS congregations through a process of entextualization of family and the development of certain sets of dispositions, a way of being Mormon, that form a *habitus* of care, and an ethic of care.

The entextualization of family results in dissonance between the way Church leaders define family in the near scriptural source “The Proclamation” and the lived experience of family as the capacious idea of *ward family*. The findings of this study conclude that the heteronormative model of family as presented in “The Proclamation” is necessary for Church doctrine and ritual, yet it is not sufficient for creating cohesive communities. The findings in this study thereby challenge the argument that only a heteronormative model of family supports strong communities. Although maintaining kinship networks hinges upon recognizing others as kin, meaning some are left out, *ward families* are inclusive and able to recognize that they are part of a human family.

The process of entextualizing an idea of family is the act of extracting text from four main sources and re-contextualizing that idea in the social context of congregation. The four sources texts are extracted from: 1) Church doctrine (that all of humankind are the literal spirit-children of a heavenly father and a heavenly mother); 2) Church rhetoric (the 1995 edict “The Proclamation,” as well as numerous sermons, etc.); 3) LDS home and temple ritual (temple ritual

includes baptism for the dead, and sealing families together; ritual within LDS homes includes Family Home Evening, and priesthood blessings), and 4) social rhetoric about the family which contains assumed, yet untested and under discussed ideas of family which are therefore taken as truth statements (such as, families care for each other, and heteronormative model of family is the necessary foundation of civil society). These four elements re-contextualize the family in the social context of LDS congregations, in part, by fulfilling ward callings. Re-contextualizing occurs and re-occurs each time temple and home rituals are performed as well as when ward callings are executed.

As ideas of family are continually entextualized and re-contextualized through rhetoric, doctrine, ward callings, home and temple ritual, they become a structured, and a structuring, set of dispositions that form the generative foundation for an ethic of care, and a *habitus* of care and identity of being Mormon. This way of being in the world, and a *habitus* of care, enables Mormons to consider their fellow congregants as if they were a special type of kinship network, as if they were family.

#### LDS Family Ideology vs. the Lived Experience of Family

It is important at the outset of this work to underline the fact that Mormon families do not always reflect the LDS ideal of family, and to clarify that when Mormons talk about family they are actually pointing to an extensive group of people which includes immediate family, extended family, and ancestors. Mormons have multiple ideas and experiences of family, although only one model is codified in “The Proclamation.”

The model of family that “The Proclamation” asserts is often referred to as the “nuclear family” (one man, one woman and their biological offspring). My research shows that within the LDS wards I observed the lived experience of family includes the presence of alternate forms of

family (such as single parent families, divorced singles, blended families, and people living together outside of marriage). The presence of these alternate forms of family did not appear to affect ward cohesiveness, and may even help promote congregational closeness. My findings suggest that Mormons in highly diverse wards and congregations feel that diversity adds to their congregational experience and cohesiveness.

### **Family: A Problematic Focus**

While many Mormons find a “home” in their congregation and a “family” in their fellow congregants, it does not always work that well for everyone. Many LDS men and women have left the Church feeling that its narrow heteronormative model of family is divisive rather than uniting. In the 60s and 80s many left over race and feminist issues; and in extreme cases, feminists and others were excommunicated. In 1993, feminist theologian Maxine Hanks was excommunicated from the Church for editing *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (1992b). Interestingly, Hanks asked to be allowed to return to the Church and was re-baptized in February, 2012 (Stack, 2012b).<sup>10</sup> While this is one isolated incident, I believe this case illustrates how it is possible that even those with radically opposing views to standard Church rhetoric and gender roles can reconcile their belief and their feminist views and maintain (or in this case return to) their membership in the Church. Of course, it is also the case that many who leave over such issues never return. When those who find Church elements divisive leave, the congregation that stays may be stronger, especially in strict churches like the LDS Church (Iannaccone, 1994).

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<sup>10</sup> In Stack’s article she notes that after her excommunication, Maxine Hanks spent thirteen years exploring her faith and being active in other religious traditions such as serving as a volunteer chaplain at Holy Cross Chapel in Salt Lake City. Hanks went so far as to consider priestly ordination but then recognized the “value and power of a lay priesthood in the body of Christ and Christian community” which gave her a “new level of understanding and ‘testimony’ of Mormonism” (Stack, 2012b). This new understanding and appreciation of Mormonism and its lay leadership is what led Hanks to request to be re-baptized into the LDS Church.

My work supports theories that strict churches (churches that demand high participation, and which have strict codes of conduct), are strong churches, meaning churches with committed members who participate regularly. Sociologist Laurence Iannaccone believes that when people are unhappy with their church and leave, it actually reinforces the congregation and makes for strong churches (Iannaccone, 1994). Although there are those that do not agree with Iannaccone's theories, I found that the LDS congregations that I observed may be reinforced because those who stay are better able to reconcile conflicting Church and personal beliefs; they may have the ability to more successfully negotiate their religious and social identities, and overall, appear to be committed Church members. So whether they stay because they believe, or leave because they do not, the result is a committed and cohesive congregation. And, when everyone agrees, or has a similar mindset (dissenters have left), it makes it easier to care for each other as "family." This element of my argument is discussed more thoroughly in chapter eight.

Despite the Church's constricted model of family, this study shows that Mormon communities are strengthened when the idea and experience of family extends beyond the LDS prescribed norm of a nuclear family. When the symbolic system of family widens enough to include expansive kinship networks and those who are "like family" although not legally or biologically related, communities can become like family. Structures such as temple ritual (which I explain later) help Mormons expand their ideas of family to include generations of ancestors, whether or not they actually participate in those rituals. An expanded idea of family is further facilitated through the repeated performance of ward callings that promote and structure care for others. Caring for others becomes a Mormon *habitus* as exhibited in an ethic of care.

## Ethic of Care

After witnessing acts of compassion and care, and listening to how important callings which prompt or support these acts are to active Mormons, I recognized them as a practice of what philosopher Carol Gilligan (1993 (1982)) called an “ethic of care.” An ethic of care is a normative theory of moral philosophy that establishes a standard of conduct based on relationality deemed to be right or ethical. Contextualizing decisions about moral dilemma, an ethic of care favors relationships and emotions over deductive reasoning. This form of contextualization is sometimes referred to as “feminist ethics” as it addresses concerns about gender, oppression, and the way we value (or dismiss) emotions in our approach to morality and conflict resolution.

First established by Carol Gilligan’s 1982 work, *In a Different Voice*, an ethic of care challenged previously accepted binary theories of moral development that held that women were less equipped than men in making moral decisions. Inherent in this theory are traits of care and nurturing practiced within a code of conduct. While Gilligan held that much of this ability to care for and nurture others is natural and comes more easily to women, I found that Mormons learn to practice these traits through serving in their ward callings. Through the repetitive practice of fulfilling ward callings, an ethic of care becomes a code of conduct, and caring for others, or serving others, becomes an ethos, or *habitus*, and a way of *being* Mormon.

## Introduction to Mormonism

Mormonism sprouted from the “burned-over district” of upstate New York in the early 1800s. The phrase “burned-over district” is a reference to the perception that the spirit of God had swept through the area much like a wildfire, leaving no fuel (unconverted) left to burn (Wessel, 1977; Cross, 1950). Many religious revivals of the time created an atmosphere of religious excitement

and experimentation. Historian Whitney R. Cross (1950) noted that all of the “spiritual experiments of western New York were ...rooted in a heritage of moral intensity and blossoming in the heat of evangelistic fervor” (144).

This evangelistic fervor had a “religious intensity and spiritual independence [which] gave birth to a host of innovations in worship and belief” (Bushman 2005:146). Amidst this fervor there was a great deal of proselytizing, especially by Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries. Some, like Mormonism’s founder Joseph Smith Jr. (most commonly referred to as Joseph Smith), claimed to be overwhelmed with having to make a decision about which religion to choose. In an effort to dispel confusion and gain clarity, the fifteen year old Smith reported that he prayed in a grove of trees seeking wisdom about what religion to choose. Mormons affectionately tell the story of how God answered that young boy’s prayer in 1820 and appeared to Joseph Smith personally.

Three years later, on September 23, 1823, Smith reported that other divine beings guided him to the location of the plates of gold upon which the *Book of Mormon* was recorded. This moment of prayer in a “sacred grove” is what Mormons point to as the beginning of the restoration of their gospel, and their Church’s history (Shipps, 1985:9).<sup>11</sup> That prayer, and the subsequent Joseph Smith story (as it is commonly referred to), are seen by members of the Church as actual historic events--events that give their personal and religious lives meaning (CJCLDS, 2007). I will return to discuss the history of Joseph Smith and the Church more fully in the following chapters.

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<sup>11</sup> The grove where Smith prayed is referred to as the “sacred grove.” It is an actual grove of trees in Palmyra, New York, and part of the Church owned Hill Cumorah Visitor Center. The center is located at 653 State Route 21 in Palmyra, New York, and is open free to the public seven days a week. In July the center stages the famous Hill Cumorah Pageant, which depicts stories from the Book of Mormon. Information about the visitor center, the sacred grove and the pageant can be found at <http://www.lds.org/locations/hill-cumorah-visitors-center>

## Joseph Smith's Plan for Family and Community

Joseph Smith had several dreams for his new Church and his followers: he felt all of humanity belonged to one human family. Smith believed that family relations could either be created or reinforced through temple ritual, and he dreamed of creating a society of believers “whose loyalty to God and to one another meant they would live together in bliss and harmony” (Bowman, 2012:32).

For Smith, a place where believers could live together in bliss and harmony was to be a literal, rather than figurative, gathering, but one that, as it turned out, would prove illusive at first. Part of Smith's vision of restoring the gospel was the establishment of what he named a *chosen and covenant people* who would build up God's kingdom in a place called Zion. This is known as the doctrine of “The Gathering of My People” or “The Gathering of Israel.”<sup>12</sup> Smith states that this doctrine was revealed to him in a vision on September 26, 1830. It was established as LDS scripture in *Doctrine and Covenants*:

And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts; Wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land, to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are set forth upon the wicked.<sup>13</sup> 29:7- 8

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<sup>12</sup> Although no longer seen as a literal gathering, this concept is still a core element in LDS teachings. “The Gathering of My People” is lesson number twelve in the LDS Sunday School class *Doctrine and Covenants and Church History*. The lesson manual can be found on the Church's website LDS.org at <http://www.lds.org/manual/doctrine-and-covenants-and-church-history-class-member-study-guide?lang=eng> (CJCLDS, 2013b) accessed. In addition to Sunday School lessons, sixteen different LDS hymns are listed under the topic “Gathering of Israel” and are among the most often sung and well-loved of many LDS congregations. Hymn number six, “Redeemer of Israel,” contains the line, “We know he is coming to gather his sheep/And lead them to Zion in love” and hymn number seven, “Israel, Israel, God is Calling,” entreats people to “Come to Zion, come to Zion, and within her wall rejoice.” Utah was been dubbed “Zion” by the early Mormon pioneers and the moniker continues. Currently there are many local references Zion in everything from the official name of a national park to irreverent nicknames given to local liquor laws (the “Zion curtain”, is a reference to the partition that is required by Utah law so that bar patrons cannot see drinks being mixed).

<sup>13</sup> The *Doctrine and Covenants* (D&C) is another book of Mormon scripture and considered to be a “standard work of scripture” alongside the *Bible*, *The Book of Mormon* and the *Pearl of Great Price*. The title plate to the *D&C* reads “The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: Containing Revelations Given to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, with some additions by his successors in the Presidency of the Church.” It was first published in 1835 and is considered an open book which can be added to as Church Presidents/Prophets receive



This passage is what germinal sociologist Thomas O’Dea calls “Mormonism’s oldest and most influential doctrine” (O’Dea, 1957:90). O’Dea designates it as such because it literally shaped the landscape of Mormon communities and the areas they settled.

Rumors of treasure hunting fueled by the claim of possessing golden plates led to the harassment of Smith and his early followers. Smith moved his family and followers first to Harmony Pennsylvania where the first edition of the *Book of Mormon* was printed in 1830.<sup>14</sup> Joseph Smith senior had left quite a bit of debt when the family left New York and creditors caught up with him and his family in Harmony. Joseph Senior was arrested and Joseph Smith Junior was also arrested for disorderly conduct.<sup>15</sup> After their release Joseph Smith announced a new revelation which called for Smith and his followers to move to Colesville New York. The group stayed there only a few months before another revelation directed them to move again to a place that would be “Zion”- the New Jerusalem, a place of refuge and gathering where the Saints could establish a city of temples in anticipation of the millennial reign of Christ. Therefore, in 1831, Smith and twelve men representing the twelve tribes of Israel met at an isolated site twelve miles west of Independence Missouri. There they “solemnly placed the first log for a house, signifying the laying of the foundation of Zion” (Allen & Leonard 1992 [1976]:69). Of course the early Mormons would move several more times, eventually quitting the formal territory of the United States altogether and moving west into Mexican territory in 1847. Throughout the years of persecution and being driven from place to place, and even as the Mormons settled in Utah, a sense of community helped hold them together.

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revelation. The last, and most current, addition to the D&C is “Official Declaration – 2” the September 30, 1978 revelation received by then president Spencer W. Kimball that the priesthood and all temple blessings would be available to all worthy men thus abolishing the ban on black men having the priesthood.

<sup>14</sup> Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:46-50.

<sup>15</sup> Brodie, 1995:88-89.

In the early years in Utah, this idea of building a Zion as a divine purpose was the cornerstone of commerce, agriculture, and society. Group survival depended upon cooperation as farming communities cleared the land and developed irrigation systems in the high mountain desert. Brigham Young reinstated the “law of consecration” (O’Dea, 1957:134), which Joseph Smith had tried, and failed at, in Nauvoo, Illinois. The law of consecration was voluntary, but very demanding; it required all those wishing to comply to deed all of their property to the Church. In return, followers would be given resources according to their needs. The idea was that this would create a strong pool of capital to hasten the building of Zion as well as provide great equality among the Saints.

Starting to build a community from scratch in the harsh Utah climate was nearly impossible. Yet, that is exactly why the area was chosen--no one else wanted it and the Mormons felt they would finally be left alone. This is reflected in the hymn, “Come, Come Ye Saints” (CJCLDS, 1985:30), cited in the title of chapter three. The third verse reads, “We’ll find the place which God for us prepared, far away in the West, where none shall come, to hurt or make afraid; there the Saints, will be blessed” (ibid). Under such conditions the wilderness would have been unbearably solitary and alienating had it not been for communal cooperation and gathering together. But, such communal gathering and togetherness began far before the saints reached Utah.

The gathering of the “scattered seed of Israel” (O’Dea, 1957:90), was taken quite literally in another sense—converts, both foreign and domestic, were expected to leave their homes and gather together with the saints in Zion. Emigration therefore became a natural extension of the Mormon mission program.<sup>16</sup> Formal missionary work began a mere two months after the Church

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<sup>16</sup> Mormons use the term emigration when speaking of early Mormons coming to Utah, and named the canyon pass the first LDS group arrived through, Emigration Canyon.

was organized. Seven years later, in 1837, the first foreign mission was established in England. Missionaries “were careful to give prospective converts only those points of doctrine for which they seemed ready, rarely mentioning the gathering to the new world” (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:127). Other potentially problematic Church doctrines (such as Smith’s visions of the three degrees of heaven, or the law of consecration that requires commitment of all of one’s resources to the Church) were also either brushed over or avoided all together. But, eventually the gathering of Israel was introduced, and in Liverpool on June 6, 1840, forty English converts boarded the *Britannia* to emigrate to New York. These were the first of 4,733 British Mormons that would leave their homeland and arrive in Nauvoo from 1841 -1844 (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:160; Shippo, 1985:160). Over the years many more would follow.

The Church established the Mutual Benefit Association and the Perpetual Immigration Fund to assist immigrants with travel to America and across America’s prairies to Utah. Often entire ships were chartered for the exclusive use of Mormons. Once on board, the new converts were divided into small congregations with a returning missionary acting as bishop. The daily routine consisted of morning prayers, religious classes, various chores, and evening prayers and Sunday services were held each week (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:291-92). Establishing such a religiously based routine set the foundation on which a new Mormon identity would be constructed.

Even though the church stopped active support of emigration through the Perpetual Immigration Fund in the early 1900s, converts still felt compelled to emigrate to the U.S. and to Utah in particular. In more recent years, a new emphasis on building temples worldwide seems to have helped convince converts that they no longer need to move to Utah to gain access to the Church and “Zion.” It is still a common practice however, even for modern-day converts, to

move to Utah after conversion. In the course of doing research for this project, I talked to one man who had moved from South Africa after converting, and a woman who had moved from Siberia. They told me they “came to Utah to live the American dream.”<sup>17</sup>

*Chain of belonging.*

Throughout the entire history of the LDS Church, conversion to Mormonism often means being separated from friends and family. Perhaps in an attempt to reconnect those friends and family, or create and legitimize new familial ties, the practice of telling each Mormon which tribe of Israel they were descended from was included in the ritual of receiving a patriarchal blessings (Brown, 2012:303).<sup>18</sup> These blessings are only given once in a lifetime and are believed to contain special instructions and blessings for the recipient. For the individual, knowing exactly which tribe they descended from creates what amateur sociologist and cultural historian Samuel Morris Brown calls a “chain of belonging” (2012:193).<sup>19</sup> This sense of belonging was made clear by Joseph Smith Sr. (Joseph Smith’s father) when, through the blessing, he would inform the individual that he or she had “Fathers and Mothers in Israel” and bless them that they would “no longer be an orphan” (Brown, 2012:215). This state of being an

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<sup>17</sup> Personal interview conducted March 3, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Patriarchal blessings are special blessings given to an individual by a patriarch on behalf of God. In other words, God is using the patriarch to speak directly to the individual in order to give him or her cautionary advice, guidance, etc. Joseph Smith’s father, Joseph Smith Sr., was the Church’s first patriarch.

<sup>19</sup> Brown is an assistant professor of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine at the University of Utah and a self-proclaimed cultural historian. He writes extensively on Mormonism and his most recent work, *In Heaven As It Is On Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death*, reinterprets Smith, and Mormonism, as a preoccupation on death. Dr. Patrick Mason, chair of Mormon Studies at Claremont Graduate University, brought Brown’s work to my attention and recommended this book specifically for my research. In an interview for “The Mormon Book Review” Brown’s biography states that he served a mission in the Louisiana-Baton Rouge Mission in the early 1990s and lists his various Church callings. In reference to his LDS Church positions it states his callings include “most durably and importantly, husband, father, and home teacher” (<http://www.themormonbookreview.com/2012/12/07/an-interview-with-samuel-brown-in-heaven-as-it-is-on-earth-joseph-smith-the-episode-08/#.UZPQNqKeaSp> accessed May 15, 2013). This inclusion highlights the LDS emphasis on family and care centered callings such as home teachers. One would be stretched to say that Brown’s work is scholarly rigorous, but it is highly readable for general audiences and serves as a thought provoking piece for further academic study. I would have preferred to use a social scientist’s work, but the fact that I use Brown’s work here highlights the dearth and subsequent need for scholarly work in cultural Mormon studies.

orphan was sometimes literal, yet also metaphorical; since then, as now, Mormons are sometimes disassociated from family when they join the church.

As I spent time among the Mormons I heard many stories of how new converts would be ridiculed by friends and family. One woman in New Jersey told me that she kept her conversion and baptism a secret from co-workers because she felt that if they knew they would make life at work very difficult for her, and no longer take her seriously.<sup>20</sup> In an article published in March/April 2013 edition of *LDS Living*, new convert Al Fox states that upon joining the church she lost every friend she had “and was forced to choose between the Church and her family” (Worthen, 2013). Fox eventually moved from her home in New York to Utah where she felt God wanted her to be.<sup>21</sup> Fox was one of five converts featured in the *LDS Living* magazine article. Three of the five were living in other countries prior to conversion but like Fox, moved to Utah after conversion.<sup>22</sup> The fifth was already living in Arizona yet talks about his trips into Utah to do research at BYU. It is clear that being in Utah helps the sense of belonging to the chain.

Historian Matthew Bowman noted that “though it lacks the drama and confrontation of earlier years, the ongoing negotiation between the Mormon vision and American culture remains as dynamic as ever” (Bowman, 2012:248). As evidenced in the course of Mitt Romney’s bid for U.S. president, Mormonism is still considered suspect within the American culture. Although attitudes are softening overall, a 2012 Pew Forum report found that roughly two out of three Mormons surveyed feel that American society does not see them as mainstream, and most Mormons feel that they are portrayed negatively in television and movies (Pew 2012b). This

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<sup>20</sup> Personal conversation June 20, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Fox writes a blog column about her LDS faith “In the head of Al Fox” which can be found at <http://alfoxshead.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>22</sup> At the time of their conversion, one woman was living in Sierra Leone, a man in Thailand, and the third man lived in Columbia.

creates a tension between wanting to be insiders, part of mainstream America, and yet at the same time wanting to remain distinctively different as a “peculiar people” (O’Dea, 1957).

### **Modern Mormonism**

One of the notable elements about Mormonism is that in many ways it is not radically different from other religious groups. Believing that the family is important is not unique to Mormonism; many other religious groups focus on family and family related issues. Mormon congregations are not the only religious groups that can be considered cohesive, that exhibit care for one another, that have programs specifically designed to take care of members’ needs , (e.g. coordinating taking dinners to members who have just had a baby or a death in the family, doing community service, etc.), or that develop emotive bonds with each other. Further, Mormons are not the only religious group that believes in an afterlife where people are reunited with their loved ones. Many other religious groups share these same traits.

Having lay clergy and specific codes of conduct is also not unique to Mormonism. Many other religious groups have voluntary clergy, or lay members who assist with clerical duties. It is not at all uncommon for religious groups to adhere to dietary restrictions, codes of conduct, and proscriptions concerning sexual behaviors, dress, etc. Finally, Mormons are not the only group in the U.S. to experiment with different forms of family such as polygamy. Other groups such as the Shakers, the Oneida movement, and the Zoroites also practiced alternate forms of marriage (Langlois, 1984:6).<sup>23</sup> For Utah Mormons, however, polygamy became an issue of conflict between Mormons and gentiles (non-Mormons) and a point of national concern in the process of Utah being admitted to the Union (O’Dea, 1957:104). As a result, both Mormons and Utah

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<sup>23</sup> Although Mormons were not unique in practicing alternate forms of family, this did make all those groups who engaged in such practices as polygamy radically different than their mainstream Christian counterparts.

remain nearly synonymous with polygamy to those with little knowledge about modern Mormonism.

Every religious tradition has its own historical background which influences the construction of both the communal and individual religious identities of its followers. The history of the LDS Church is very distinct, and does contrast with that of most other U.S. born religious movements. Mormons may be the only American religious group to have left the United States in order to avoid persecution (I will discuss this topic further in chapter three). They are the only group that performs proxy temple ritual that enables salvation for deceased ancestors. Mormons are the only self-identified Christians that believe that the holy trinity consists of three separate beings, two of which (God and Jesus Christ) have actual human-like bodies, and the added inclusion of a Heavenly Mother. Having divine bodies enables the Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother to create all of humanity as spirit-children.<sup>24</sup> This view of the godhead is one of the biggest reasons that other Christians do not recognize Mormons as Christian.<sup>25</sup>

Despite sharing common elements with other religious groups, Mormons are still seen as a peculiar people.<sup>26</sup> A 2012 Pew Report survey found that as many as six in ten adults felt that Mormonism was “very different” from their own faith (Pew, 2012b:6). Therefore, part of my task in exploring Mormonism is to illuminate the similarities with other religious groups and

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<sup>24</sup> There was a time when speaking of a Heavenly Mother was considered heresy and grounds for excommunication. Times have changed however and I now hear members as well as Church officials refer to a heavenly mother.

<sup>25</sup> The other biggest reasons Mormons are often not thought to be Christian is that LDS theology teaches that humans can become gods, just as god was once a human. Lorenzo Snow, the fifth president of the LDS Church taught that “as god is, man may become” (CJCLDS, 2012d:83).

<sup>26</sup> The phrase “peculiar people” may have first been used by Thomas F. O’Dea in his 1957 work *The Mormons*. O’Dea used the phrase to point to a unique religious identity Mormons embrace upon conversion (1957:53). Mormons themselves have adopted this phrase to describe themselves as a distinct and chosen group as described in 1 Peter 2:9 which reads: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.” I will discuss this concept in more detail throughout this project.

larger cultural norms, as well as note the differences and how these influence their cultural norms (including family).

*The relationship between religion and family*

Sociologist Penny Edgell's work considered the relationship between religion and family, and historically, how the family has been used as an ideal for religious life in the United States. She explored the ways Christian religious institutions and families have depended on each other for a sense of identity and social continuity. Her goal was to provide insight into ways religious institutions change without assuming that change is a sign of secularization or accommodation to secular values (Edgell, 2006:10-11). The portion of her work that interests me most, however, is her consideration of the ways religion and family affect each other.

Edgell saw that identity reinforcement comes from "highly articulated and explicit meaning systems that construct and regulate patterns of conduct" (Edgell, 2006:177). She pointed out that people generally encounter the taken-for-granted assumptions about this kind of importance of the family through religious ideas, through sermons, parenting workshops, church programs, and ministries offered by local congregations. Churches send messages about what family should be through their rhetoric and programs. Congregants send messages about which church programs are relevant through their attendance or non-attendance. For Mormons I believe it is these patterns of conduct that speak most loudly about who they are and what they believe. These patterns include observing the Word of Wisdom, attending Church, filling ward callings (lay leadership positions "called" by the Bishop) and practicing an ethic of care towards others.

*LDS Church demographic thumbnail sketch*

The Mormon Church has grown over the last 100 years, developing in the West to become one of the most successful American religions. According to historian Paul Conkin,



Mormonism is the largest apocalyptic denomination in the U.S. and is the sixth largest denomination in America (Conkin, 1997:162).<sup>27</sup> Although it may still be the case that most Mormons live in Utah, the LDS Church has spread globally.<sup>28</sup>

In 1984, sociologist Rodney Stark famously predicted that the LDS church would continue its upward growth trend and that by 2030 global membership could reach over 250 million members worldwide, making it a new world faith on the same level as Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity (Stark, 1984). Much to the disappointment of many Mormons, those stunning growth rates have not materialized.<sup>29</sup> Currently the LDS Newsroom site, “Facts and Statistics,” (CJCLDS, 213f) claims 14,782,483 members worldwide worshipping in any one of the current 29,014 congregations.<sup>30</sup> Sociologists Rick Phillips and Ryan T. Cragun believe that the official Church figures are over-inflated. In their 2008 survey, Phillips and Cragun found that the Church officially claims anyone who has ever been baptized and does not subtract the numbers of apostates or “out-switchers” (2011:1). What Phillips and Cragun define as “out-switchers” or apostates are what others call Jack Mormons—people who have physically left the Church (no longer attend) but who have not formally left (officially asked for their names to be removed from the Church records). Deaths are not always documented in a timely fashion which also inflates membership totals. It may also be the case that the Church is very slow in removing the names of those who have formally left the Church.

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<sup>27</sup> Conkin does not list all six. The other traditional mainstream denominations he lists are: Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians.

<sup>28</sup> A 2009 Pew Report survey found that 76% of all Mormons lived in the west and 35% of those lived in Utah.

<sup>29</sup> In his 2005 book *The Rise of Mormonism*, Stark holds firm to his earlier projections of fantastic eventual growth (2005:145-46). Other social scientists like Rick Phillips and Ryan Cragun argue that statics and growth rates (such as those predicted by Stark) do not take into account those who become disaffiliated, so such figures are over-inflated (2011). See also “Keeping members a challenge for LDS church; Mormon myth: The belief that the church is the fastest growing faith in the world doesn’t hold up” article in *The Salt Lake Tribune* (July 26, 2005). In this article reporter Peggy Fletcher Stack states that only one-third of the Church’s reported membership are actively attending church each week, a fact she directly challenges Stark’s figures with (Stack, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-stats> Accessed August 17, 2013.

When the numbers of deaths and “out-switchers” are taken into account, Phillips and Cragun claim that the growth rates are actually closer to U.S. national averages. For instance, Phillips and Cragun found that in 2008 the church claimed 5,974,041 global members, but that the American Religious Identification Survey, which only counts those who self-identify as Mormon, reported 3,158,000 global members.<sup>31</sup> Those figures, say Phillips and Cragun, are more in line with the general U.S. population growth and are therefore more believable (2011).

When considering LDS congregations, it is also very important to keep in mind that Mormon congregations are formed differently than most other religious communities. Mormon congregations are decided by geographic parish boundaries; their physical address dictates their “choice” of ward (congregation); a model very similar to the parish model of the U.S Catholic church. The rule of attending the ward (congregation) you are assigned to is fairly strictly enforced. In the course of my research I found several instances where people were attending a congregation other than the one they were assigned to, and were told by the local clergy that they must return to their designated community.<sup>32</sup> I got the clear impression that attending other wards was not simply frowned upon, it was forbidden without proper consent.<sup>33</sup>

I heard many stories of LDS members choosing to stay in a specific area because they liked their congregation. For instance, when one young couple I interviewed was able to finally afford a home and move out of their apartment, they choose to look for a house in the same ward (geographic region and congregation) that they had been living in. Of course, it is quite probable that the opposite could also true. Generally, however, I found it more common for Mormons who

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<sup>31</sup> Although global membership numbers are used here, the vast majority of Mormons still reside in the U.S. so looking at U.S. national trends provides a good indicator of overall church trends in membership.

<sup>32</sup> Mormons refer to this as “ward-hopping.”

<sup>33</sup> I did hear about one family who was able to attend a different ward than the one they were assigned to, but permission to attend had to be granted by both the home (assigned) ward and the ward the family wished to attend. As a non-member I have never been told which wards I could or could not attend. I suppose the loop-hole for non-members is that since they are not on the official Church records, they have not been assigned a specific ward/congregation, so are free to attend as they choose.

do not feel that they are a good fit for the congregation they have been assigned to, to simply become inactive rather than move. On the other hand, there are those that stay in spite of the fact they do not feel they are a good fit. One man told me “I really don’t like the people in my ward. I have absolutely nothing in common with them, and would never choose them as friends. But, that doesn’t mean I don’t love them.”<sup>34</sup> Still, separate from moving or staying, ward boundaries change; so even if a Mormon does not move, he or she may be assigned to a new congregation. I believe this element of continual flux, due to circumstances outside the control of the congregation, makes looking at the possible cohesiveness of LDS communities quite intriguing.

As sociologist Nancy Ammerman noted, in the United States, people tend to gather together in congregations that share a common social and cultural heritage. Since there is not an official state church; people voluntarily gather together in religious communities in which they feel at home, and where their fellow congregants are like themselves. A voluntary gathering has cultural elements that help in creating a feeling of “at home-ness” (Ammerman et al., 1998:80) which shapes the congregation’s ways of doing things. Mormons, however, are not free to choose which LDS congregation they belong to. For Mormons the common social and cultural heritage is physical location, and Church membership. The fact that each ward attempts to be the same and therefore familiar to Mormons everywhere, establishes that “at home-ness.”

### Research Questions

This study stems from the observation that many Mormons, regardless of their location or the amount of time they have spent in their current ward (physical location) and congregation, refer to their congregation as their *ward family*. I was curious about the frequency and ubiquitous use of this phrase. I wondered to what extent the naming of others outside of actual kin relationship

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<sup>34</sup> Personal conversation dated April 15, 2013.

as family was influenced in part by the church's emphasis on family, temple ritual for ancestors, and extended kinship networks.

I took up this topic because I noticed that Mormon wards were thriving in circumstances that often force other congregations to crumble (Ammerman, 1997:347). For instance, I found Mormon congregations that were successful in very transient inner-city neighborhoods rife with social problems, in areas with an influx of immigrants, and in areas where the majority of congregants are living at or below the poverty line and in need of welfare assistance including food and shelter and indeed, this describes one of my observed congregations. I wondered if the Church welfare and caregiving programs (such as the bishops storehouse, and visiting teachers) helped congregants feel cared for in the way that family members feel cared for when relatives offer aid. Further, did extending and receiving care from fellow congregants help bind congregations together?

A similar social policy study using material gathered from as far back as 1930s considered the connection between church, family, and school in the African American Community (Billingsley and Caldwell, 1991). Researchers Bilingsley and Caldwell found that family, and family support and assistance programs are very important to Black churches and their congregants. They reported that the majority of African American households were family households but were highly diverse in structure. For instance families could be comprised of people who were biologically related, related by marriage, formal and informal adoption, or by simple appropriation. They also reported that 70% of all Black churches provided community outreach programs to congregants and the larger community and the largest category of the offered programs were for family welfare assistance. These family centered assistance programs offered food, clothing, shelter and financial aid (Billingsley and Caldwell, 1991). While

Billingsley and Caldwell's study found a positive correlation between family, church, and welfare programs aimed at assisting families, it did not consider the effect any of these elements had on congregational cohesiveness.

In addition to welfare programs, I wondered to what extent LDS home and temple ritual, and the lived experience of being a peculiar people who consider themselves the actual spirit-children of heavenly parents, aided in the social construction of family. Overall, I felt that the juxtaposition of the Church's emphasis on family, and the individual's reference to their religious community as family, would be an opportunity to explore how Mormons entextualize the idea of family. My first question then became: what do Mormons mean when they say *ward family*?

I began the task of answering this question by dividing my research material into three main categories: 1) bureaucratic systems such as church programs and official church rhetoric; 2) duty and obligation in church callings and Church doctrine such as temple ritual; 3) Mormon history and identity as a peculiar people. As my research progressed, however, I discovered these categories were too overlapping and did not allow enough space to consider the effects of social change on LDS beliefs and practices and the way the LDS focus has gone from priesthood to family (which I will discuss shortly). It also did not allow for the lived experience of family. Therefore I developed a more robust model that more accurately depicted the complex topic of family in LDS thought and experience.

My research shows that there are four basic components that contribute to the way Mormons think about family. I put these together in a model that I call the *Symbolic System of Family*. The model is designed to illustrate how four distinct components, or pieces, combine and interact with each other to form a larger whole. It is reminiscent of a child's wooden block

puzzle wherein each individual piece, as well as the assembled puzzle, is triangular in shape. The pieces are free floating and can be arranged in a multitude of shapes, but only one arrangement reflects the triangular shape of the individual pieces as well as the finished puzzle. This repeating of one shape throughout the individual pieces as well as the finished puzzle is meant to reflect the way that themes and elements are repetitive and present in some way in all of the pieces.

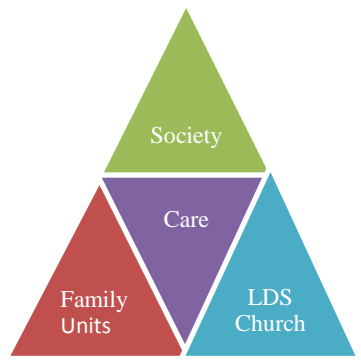
Of course, I am not the first social scientist to employ the concept of smaller pieces making a larger whole. Danièle Hervieu-Léger describes religion as a “chain of memory” (2000) that a community of past, present, and future believers construct and maintain to form a tradition (collective memory).<sup>35</sup> Meredith McGuire’s work leans upon Hervieu-Léger’s concept in order to describe how ritual, narrative, and routine practices become embodied religious and spiritual practices—a “lived religion” (2008). My work utilized these seminal thinkers as I considered how a focus on family contributes to the lived expression of Mormonism, and creates a model for the symbolic system of family.

#### Model for the Symbolic System of Family

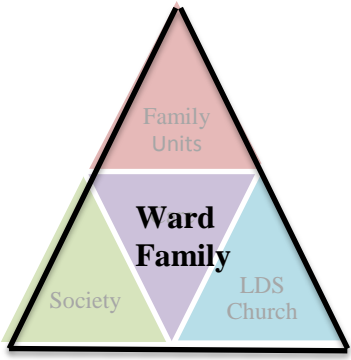
The *Symbolic System of Family* is meant to reflect the structure of the re-contextualized idea of family by presenting a solid geometric figure as a combined set of four structuring elements: Society, the LDS Church, Family Units, and Care. The entextualization of family occurs within each of the four elements, and is reflected in the combined whole as Ward Family

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<sup>35</sup> The chain of memory differs from the chain of belonging mentioned above in one important aspect—the chain of belonging is seen as a literal lineage one belongs to, and the chain of memory are the narratives and practices that both forms and is formed by that group

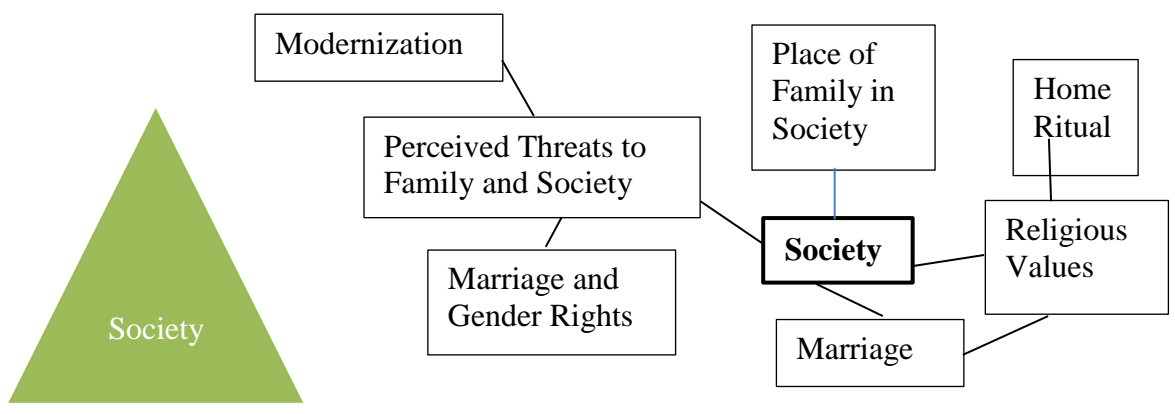


**Structuring elements within the Symbolic System of Family**

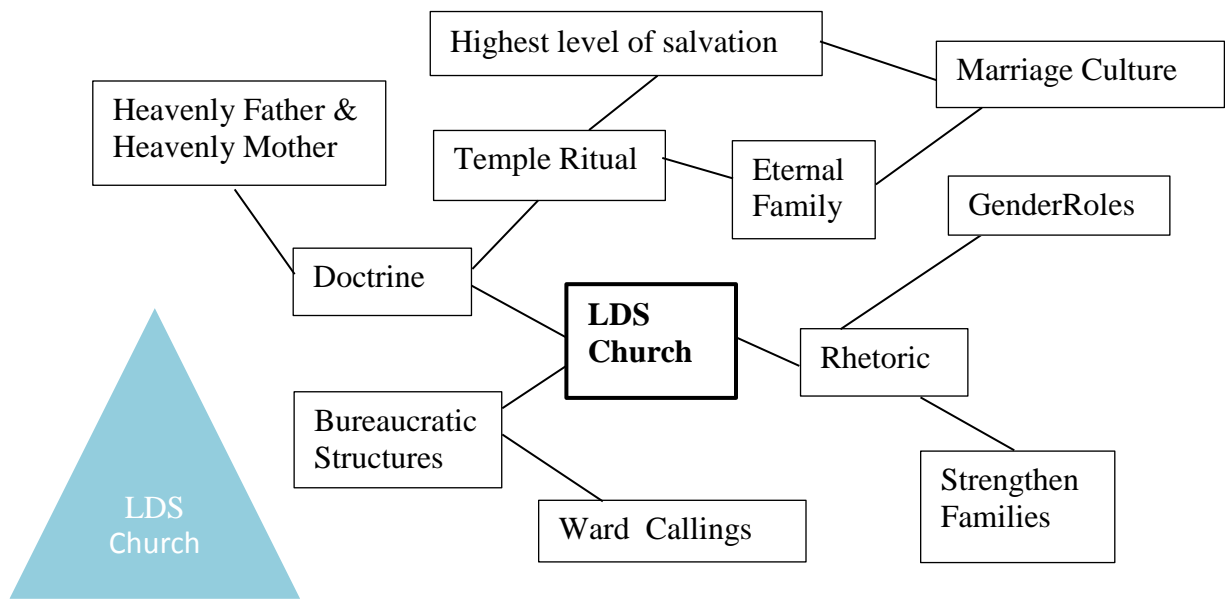


**Ward Family**

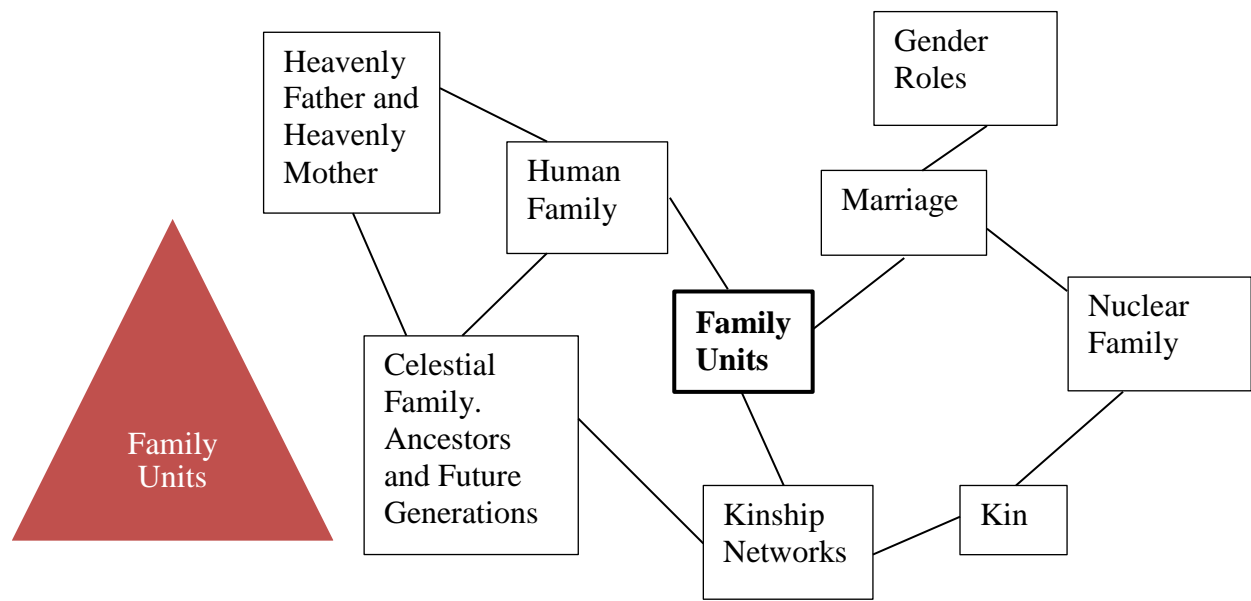
**Model for the Symbolic System of Family**



**Society: Social Instances and Rhetoric of Family**

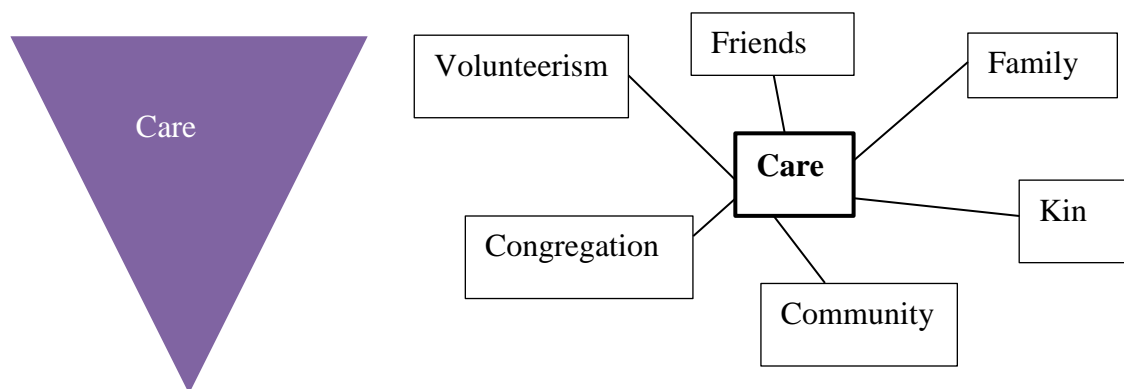


**The LDS Church: Themes of Family within the LDS Church**



**Family Units: Social structures of LDS families**





### Care: Social instances of care

I will discuss these four structuring components (Society, Family Units, LDS Church, and Care) throughout the following chapters as I consider the social structure of family within Mormonism. Let me begin by tracing the history of the LDS Church's focus on family; family has not always been at the forefront of Mormon thought.

### Shift in Focus from Priesthood to Family

The LDS Church's current emphasis on family is relatively new having evolved since the early 1960s in response to the social changes of the time.<sup>36</sup> Changes, such as the introduction of new forms of birth control, the passing of the Equal Pay and Equal Employment Acts, the Civil Rights Movement and the feminist movement all seemed to question the families place in society. I could further speculate about other religiously based events, such as the highly publicized 1953 raid on the Fundamental LDS Church's (FLDS) polygamist village of Short

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<sup>36</sup> Please note that as I proceed I will be using American family patterns and structures, and other forms of family, such as polygamy, that have been a part of Mormon history. I will be pointing to a nuclear family model (husband, wife, and their biological offspring) most often not because other models are less relevant, rather, because that is the prescribed model of family used by the LDS Church. Even though the LDS Church is a global church, many aspects (such as the idea of family) are notably American in nature.

Creek Arizona, that reminded the public that polygamy was still being practiced by some religious groups.

These cultural and social changes are all also examples of how government and legal definitions shape ideas of family. It could be argued that the LDS Church was working hard to be seen as an all American Church by placing an emphasis on the family rather than the Church's patriarchal system of priesthood. The Church may have also wanted to stress that they were no longer polygamists by focusing on a more "traditional" model of family. The success of that push toward being seen as an American Church and for more mainstream recognition can be seen in John F. Kennedy's 1963 visit to temple square in Salt Lake City Utah. Kennedy commented on the pioneer history of persecution and success in Utah as a role model for American success (Naiper-Pearce, 2013).

While family has always been a salient point, prior to the 1960s the priesthood was the favored topic of sermons from general authorities. Beginning around 1970, family began to be a popular topic of General Conference talks. General Conference is a biannual meeting held in Salt Lake City, Utah, and attended by Mormons worldwide via internet, satellite, radio, television, or for about 24,000 people, in person at the LDS Conference Center on temple square.<sup>37</sup> LDS President Thomas S. Monson opened the first session of the Saturday April 5, 2014 General Conference with the phrase "we are gathered together as a great family more than fifteen million strong."<sup>38</sup>

Dating as far back as the General Conference archives exist, family has been the topic of 2,393 Conference sermons.<sup>39</sup> While the frequency in each session was minimal in the 1970s, the

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<sup>37</sup> The LDS Church's conference center holds 21,000 people and the tabernacle, which is used for overflow, seats another 3,000.

<sup>38</sup> Internet broadcast at [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org). Accessed April 5, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Available General Conference archives only extend back as far as 1971.

topic has gained popularity, and now, on average, family is the focus of three out of four conference talks. Overall the Church is aimed at “strengthening the family” and official rhetoric geared towards that end includes Church programs, the Church’s administrative handbook, magazine articles, and numerous workshops (CJCLDS, 2010; CHCLDS, 2013a).<sup>40</sup> “The Proclamation” published in 1995 codifies the Church’s current perspective on the family and highlights procreation as the central function of the family (CJCLDS, 1995). Church handbooks state that the goal of Church programs is, in part, to strengthen families. While the Church is very clear about what constitutes a family (i.e. a man, a woman, and their children), it is vague about what constitutes a *strong* family. The constant reference to strengthening the family conveys the importance of family as a Church focus.

The first hint of a shift away from priesthood came on September 30, 1961 when Elder Harold B. Lee, under the direction of the First Presidency, announced that all LDS Church programs were to be correlated through the priesthood to strengthen the family and the individual. That was the beginning of the Church’s correlation movement which standardized all Church publications, programs, and organizational models (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:596-97). This move toward standardization could be interpreted as a way in which the Church could respond to an overall questioning of the place of family and women in society.<sup>41</sup>

The 1960s brought about new ideas about sex and family planning. In 1961 the Food and Drug Administration made oral contraceptives (birth control, commonly known as “the pill”)

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<sup>40</sup> The Church uses the phrase “strengthen the family” repeatedly but has yet to clearly define what constitutes a strong family or why strong families are desirable. For example Mary Cook’s October 2007 General Conference talk states that all families need strengthening, and that “the example of your righteous life will strengthen your family... whatever form your family may take” (Cook, 2007). The reader/listener is left to infer that righteous families are strong families.

<sup>41</sup> Discussions about bodies in society may be of special importance to Mormons. In a religion where two of the godhead, God and Jesus Christ, are thought to have actual bodies that are much like our mortal bodies (although theirs are divine in nature), and the belief that people live in heaven in perfected human bodies, thoughts about bodies takes on a unique importance. I will discuss this in more depth in the sections addressing gender roles.

available for the first time. This brought sex and reproductive rights into public and legal conversation in new ways that conservative and religious groups (such as the Catholic Church) saw as being “antifamily” (Steinem, 1995 [1983]:352) and a threat to morality.<sup>42</sup> Also in 1961, President John F. Kennedy established an advisory commission chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt to investigate the status of women’s equality in education, the workplace, and within U.S. law. This led, in part, to the establishment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which made discrimination based on sex or race illegal. Concerning the LDS Church, it was issues of racial discrimination that drew attention.

The passing of the Civil Rights Act caused attention to be drawn to the LDS Church regarding its practice of excluding black males aged 12 and older, from holding the priesthood. Church leaders were harshly criticized, and Brigham Young University (BYU) athletic teams were picketed, harassed, and at some games anti-Mormon riots broke out (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:620-21; Haws, 213:47). Women were also excluded from holding the priesthood, but women had not yet gained equal social status in the greater society, so gender discrimination did not earn the same level of attention. Despite a lesser level of awareness overall, the feminist movement was gaining momentum.

The late 1950s and early 1960s is what feminist scholars like Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards point to as the birth of the “second wave feminist movement” (2000:20). The fuel for this movement was provided by publications such as Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). This resurgence in the feminist movement was brought about, in part, by the increasing number of women in the workforce, and the fact that women were earning much less than men for performing the same duties. This led to the 1963 Equal Pay Act. It also led to conservative

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<sup>42</sup> For further reading on the Church’s stance on contraception and Mormon women’s interpretation and experience of that stance see Melissa Proctor’s 2003 article “Bodies, Babies, and Birth Control.”

groups reinforcing strict gender roles more firmly. For Mormons this meant reinforcing the Victorian ideal that a woman's place was in the home rather than in the workforce (Heaton, 1988).<sup>43</sup>

Through the years the LDS Church has held fast to the Victorian ideals and strict gender roles of their roots. Thirty years after the Equal Pay Act, in his May 18, 1993 address to the All Church Coordinating Council, LDS Apostle Boyd K. Packer stated that the feminist movement, the gay-lesbian movement, and "so-called intellectuals," posed the greatest dangers to the Church.<sup>44</sup> These were labeled dangers, because all three are cultural forces that threaten Church sanctioned family ideals (Williams, 2011:55, 61). The LDS Church is not alone in this line of thinking. While Packer vocalized this sentiment for the LDS Church, other conservative churches have used (and continue to use) this type of rhetoric.

Despite women gaining rights in the secular world, LDS women have been repeatedly told that their place was in the home. Economic research fellow at the Center for the Economic Study of Religion at George Mason University, Carrie Miles (2008), notes that in the early part of the 1900s very little attention was paid to women's roles. The Church's general authorities rarely addressed women's issues and during the first fifty years of the Church's magazine, the *Improvement Era* only eighteen articles were indexed under "women." Women's issues suddenly became more pressing however, as women entered the paid workforce to replace men fighting in World War II. It is no surprise then that in the 1940's LDS women started being told to restrict their activities to homemaking (Miles, 2008:109).

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<sup>43</sup> The LDS Church was organized and grew during the Victorian era (1830-1913) which, in part, gave rise to the ideas of family being the cornerstone of society and a "little church" responsible for instilling moral behavior in children. It also held that parents had a "God-given" role in making sure that their children would be Christian. See Janet Fishburn's 1991 book *Confronting the Idolatry of Family*.

<sup>44</sup> This address by Boyd K. Packer is infamous in LDS circles for several reasons. The most notable reason was because it was given shortly before the "purge" of the "September Six." The September Six was a group of six LDS members who were excommunicated and or disfellowshipped for heresy – all of which fit into at least one of the three dangers Packer pointed out.

LDS women who wanted or needed to work outside of the home were cautioned by Church leaders to pray about that decision and to gain both the Lord's and their husband's approval before going to work (Miles, 2008:114-15). Such statements reveal the assumption that all women have husbands, that all women have the luxury of choosing to work, rather than needing to work, and that all women have the option and/or desire to stay at home with children. In short, the Church's statement underscores the sentiment that the only legitimate career option for women is as wife and mother. And, as is the case in much of the Church's rhetoric about family, single women, women who are the sole breadwinners for their families, and childless women are largely unrecognized and unacknowledged, a chief complaint among those I interviewed.<sup>45</sup> One woman told me "I quit going to church for about ten years. Since I was single and had no kids, I just didn't feel like there was a place for me there—I didn't fit in."<sup>46</sup>

"The Proclamation" which emphasized women's roles as mothers and wives was published in 1995 at the height of the rise of the Christian Right. While "The Proclamation" gives a nod to modern economic forces, it still lays out a "near scriptural basis for the sexual division of labor" (Miles, 2008:124). Fathers are to be providers and preside over families while mothers are to nurture their children. Highlighting men's and women's roles as mother and father leaves no room to talk about family in any other terms than the heteronormative model that produces biological offspring. Heterosexual marriage, and motherhood as a divine calling, puts women's bodies into a direct relationship with Mormon doctrine. Presenting women as being "primarily responsible for the nurture of their children" (CJCLDS, 1995) both ignores

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<sup>45</sup> Arguably this is changing, and Church leaders are becoming more sensitive to singlehood and women without children. Still, the feeling of being left out or feeling as if they were second-class was a common complaint among single, divorced, and childless interviewees of both sexes, but especially women. For further reading see Darrington, Piercy and Niehuis, 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Personal interview conducted August 28, 2012.

men's role as a nurturer and renders childless women or single individuals invisible.<sup>47</sup> Temple ritual underscores the gender based soteriology and doctrinally anchors the place of family in society, in the Church, and in heaven.

The elements briefly discussed above illustrate some of the ways that the Church's focus on the family has evolved, and provide a better picture of what I mean when I refer to the social elements that have influenced the Church's focus on family. I have also pointed out some of the elements many find divisive rather than unifying.

### **Choosing Resources**

The sociology of Mormonism is a neonate arm of inquiry within the field of sociology of religion. Scholars in the field such as historian Dr. Patrick Mason, head of Mormon Studies at Claremont University, readily acknowledge that the lack of good social scientific inquiry leaves the rest of us having to be a bit more flexible on the resources we choose to use in our own research. For instance, when I asked Dr. Mason to suggest a reference concerning the idea of family in Mormonism he directed me to a book by amateur historian, Samuel Morris Brown (2012). Brown is actually a cardio surgeon and an assistant professor of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine at the University of Utah, not an historian, nor a sociologist.

Others have recommended works by Harold Bloom, a literary critic, or columns and articles by journalist and scholar Joanna Brooks who initially self-published a collection of her writings and now writes regularly for Religious Dispatches, an on-line magazine. These types of sources may not normally be considered academically rigorous enough for a project such as this

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<sup>47</sup> The role of parents as a means of grace is a common theme in American theology, especially in Puritan thought (see Fishburn, 1983). The LDS focus of temple ritual however may be the only American religion that codified this idea.

dissertation, however, the acknowledgement of their usefulness by experts in the field justify their inclusion.

I acknowledge that some resources are rather dated. Specifically the use of sociologist William Goode's work, which dates back to the 1960s was chosen as he was cited with enough frequency in other texts that I consulted that it was clear his thoughts on family were important to the field. Further, Goode's model of family still resonates with LDS views on family. I also acknowledge that much of the work on LDS families comes from the 1980s. I speculate that much of the interest during that time was generated by the larger social issues I discussed above. Interest seems to have quieted and overall the literature in the field linking religion and family is sparse and the field is underexplored (Houseknecht & Pankhurst, 2000:10).

A major reason the field is underexplored is that during the 1990s the Church actively silenced Mormon scholars. As many of those writing within Mormon studies were themselves LDS, scholarship during that period came to a near halt. Although now twenty-years in the past, the highly publicized excommunication of six activist scholars in 1993 is still a painful reminder of the Church's willingness to discipline its members, and sobering testament to how tightly the Church once controlled the scholarship in the field. Thankfully, the field is beginning to grow again although it will take some time to make up for all those silent years.

An ongoing problem in choosing literature to use is finding scholarly work that understands Mormonism enough to be accurately informative, yet is not so biased as to assume that God is orchestrating the social patterns of Mormons and Mormonism. An example of insider bias is reflected in the statement by James T. Duke (1998), a Mormon and sociologist teaching at BYU. "God achieves his purposes using sociological principles, and by studying social conditions we may come to know more about God and his dealings with mortal beings" (2). This



statement may cause non-LDS social scientists to question whether his research is theological rather than sociological and as such, whether it is useful to social scientists.

When considering texts I reflected on *why* they were written from a particular standpoint (such as insiders, armatures, or literary critics) and where appropriate I have made space for these voices. Also, since Mormonism does not exist in a social vacuum, and there is much to be learned by comparison; I have also included thoughts by scholars outside of Mormonism on the more general topics of family, society, and religion such as Cahill (2000), Mintz and Kellogg (1987), and Stacey (1993; 1996). On the whole, as a social scientist my work is grounded by theoretical thinkers such as Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Peter Berger, William Goode, and established experts in the field of Mormonism such as Armand Mauss, Jan Shipps, and Thomas O’Dea.

Sociologist Judith Stacey’s 1996 work *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age* is important to my thesis of a flexible and expanded view of family. Stacey noted that in today “global village” it takes “much more than a village to help a child become a responsible, competent, and ethical adult, or even to survive the passage” (1996:14). Through her work, Stacey encouraged forward movement toward postmodern family life and models of family that include gay and lesbian families. I too encourage forward movement through more capacious ideas of family as illustrated in the notion of *ward family*.

### **Introduction of Terms**

When working with such general topics like family and care, it becomes clear that defining these vague terms is necessary. For the purpose of this study I will use the definition of family that I found most often in the works I consulted: family is an “organized network of socioeconomic and reproductive interdependence and support grounded in biological kinship and

marriage” (Cahill, 2000:xi) yet may also include adopted children. This defines family as a social unit created by kinship and/or marriage, and points to child rearing as the function of family.

This is the form of family that the LDS Church promoted, therefore, it is the one I refer to most often. A more robust discussion on definitions of family will be included in chapter four.

The term “care” can be surprisingly problematic. Due to cultural context, taking care of one’s family members can take on forms that to one group may seem perfectly reasonable, yet absolutely horrifies others (e.g. honor killings). The way I will be using the term care refers to the ways that people nurture others and feel a sense of responsibility in being attentive to each other’s needs. In LDS contexts care is often synonymous with service.

When working with Mormonism it is very clear that defining terms is crucial. The Mormon habit of borrowing terms from other Christian traditions, which often mean something entirely different in LDS contexts, can be confusing. This brief discussion of terms is meant only as an introduction in order to provide a basic working vocabulary which will make further reading easier. Full definitions are provided in the appendix.

The LDS Church is a global denomination divided into smaller and smaller units. The global Church is the largest unit and contains all Mormons worldwide. “Areas” are the largest unit of Church and consist of very large geographic regions such as Europe, Asia North, Central America, etc. Areas of the Church consist of many “Stakes.” Stakes are smaller units of the Church and consist of five to twelve branches or wards. As already mentioned, individual LDS congregations are often called “wards.” Wards are the standard local unit of the church and refer to both the geographic region the congregation resides in as well as the congregation itself.

“Branches” are the smallest unit and contain less than 300 people, yet some can be as small as twenty-five people.<sup>48</sup>

Leaders of LDS congregations are called bishops. Unlike many other religious leaders, LDS bishops do not preach; their role is more of an overseer and spiritual counselor rather than a teacher or preacher. The LDS title of bishop does not designate a high office holder as in the Catholic Church where one rises in the ranks and only a select few hold a position as Bishop. LDS bishops are always male priesthood holders. Bishops are not professional clergy and do not go to seminary; they are called to serve in the congregation they attend. Most, if not all, have other full-time jobs and their work in the congregation is unpaid. A bishop usually serves four or five years before being replaced with another male member of the congregation. After his term of service has been completed he returns to the congregational fold with no special status and is available to serve in other callings (such as Sunday school teacher, nursery worker, etc.).

Priesthood is the general term used to indicate the power to act with the authority of God. There are two branches of priesthood, the Aaronic, and the Melchizedek. Currently only men are eligible to be given priesthood authority. Men and boys are ordained into this position by the “laying on of hands” (a blessing in which the receiver’s head is anointed with consecrated oil and the one bestowing the blessings lays his hands upon the receiver’s head). Boys as young as twelve can be ordained into the lowest office of the Aaronic priesthood after which they are called deacons. Deacons pass the sacrament (the Lord’s Supper) each week.<sup>49</sup> Other priesthood offices include priests, elders, and high priests. Priests are boys of at least 16 years of age, who

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<sup>48</sup> Branches may grow enough (containing 300-500 people) to be classified as a ward, or wards may shrink enough to become branches.

<sup>49</sup> In LDS services the Lord’s Supper is served to the congregants who remain in their seats.

can bless the sacrament and baptize.<sup>50</sup> Elder is the priesthood office that male missionaries hold, and High Priests are older adult men (typically middle-aged or older). All Church leadership positions such as bishop, counselors to the bishop, stake presidents, branch presidents, mission presidents, seventies, patriarchs, apostles, and Church president, must be priesthood holders, so by default must be men.

LDS temples are not places of worship in the same way that local ward buildings are. Local wards are used as a place to gather together as a congregation for weekly Sunday worship services. Temples, on the other hand, are places that are focused on salvific ritual for the individual (Hammarberg, 2013:173). This type of ritual and individual worship is seen by Mormons as religious work, and just like many other places of work, it is closed on Sunday (ibid).

Not all Mormons are able to enter the temples. Only members “in good standing” are eligible to enter and use temples. Being a member in good standing means that one pays a full tithe (10%), adheres to codes of conduct such as the word of wisdom, attends church regularly, keeps the commandments, and has successfully passed a bishop’s interview and been given a “temple recommend.” Those receiving a “recommend” are issued a card that must be shown in order to gain admittance into any LDS temple. Temple recommends must be renewed at least every two years. Mormons are not required to obtain a temple recommend in order to retain their membership in the Church.

To be “sealed” in the temple refers to the temple marriage ceremony where the bride and groom are sealed together for all time and eternity. Children that are produced from this union are said to be “born under the covenant” and are automatically sealed to their parents. Proxy

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<sup>50</sup> Mormons do not practice infant baptism; the youngest age that they will baptize children is at the age of eight. Mormons believe that those younger than eight have not yet reached the age of accountability and are therefore not candidates for baptism.

sealings (weddings) are also performed for ancestors who had been married civilly but were never married in the temple.

Families (Mormon and non-Mormon) that are already established before a temple marriage can also be sealed together. For example, if a couple converts to Mormonism and has been married civilly, they must have been LDS members for at least one year before they can be sealed in the temple with their children. Similarly, if an LDS couple that was married civilly before acquiring temple recommends, they too must wait one year before going through the temple.<sup>51</sup> This is the only time that children under the age of twelve are allowed to participate in temple ritual (children twelve and older are able to stand in as proxy for baptisms of the dead).

Baptisms for (or of) the dead refers to the temple ritual of proxy baptism for ancestors. Mormons believe that baptism by submersion is one of the necessary rituals that must be performed in order to gain access to heaven, and Mormonism does not recognize other Christian baptisms, so one must be baptized a Mormon in order to attain salvation. Since Mormonism is relatively new, it is obvious that many who lived before the Church was established were not baptized, and many the world over have not had the chance to convert. Therefore, Mormons established the proxy ritual to baptize deceased ancestors with the belief that those awaiting baptism in the afterlife still have a choice whether or not to accept the baptism done on their behalf. In other words, having proxy ritual performed on your behalf does not automatically make you a Mormon; in the afterlife you have the option of accepting or rejecting the ritual.

Mormons are able to baptize their own ancestors if they are: a) the closest living blood relative, b) have written permission from the closest living blood relative, or c) if the person they

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<sup>51</sup> In some areas where logistics or local legal requirements impinge on the one year waiting rule special considerations and accommodations have been made.

are doing the ritual for has been dead for at least one hundred years.<sup>52</sup> Mormons are strongly encouraged not to do baptisms for people outside of their ancestry—however, since not all Mormons are eligible, or able, to attend the temple, they can still submit names of their ancestors they wish rituals to be performed for. Therefore, it is quite common for Mormons to do proxy rituals for their own ancestors as well as for people they do not know.<sup>53</sup>

### How the Dissertation Proceeds

This work argues that while there is a correlation between the Church’s focus on family and congregational cohesiveness, it is only when the idea of family is expanded do congregations become *ward families*. That the necessary element, then, in cohesive congregations is not an emphasis on or presence of a particular model of family, but an ethic of care. With the exception of chapter two, which provides a detailed look at the methodology employed for this project and introduces the LDS communities accessed for field research, the remaining chapters consider how an ethic of care and an expanded idea of family is constructed and applied.

In the course of doing extensive fieldwork, I heard the phrase “line upon line; precept upon precept” (2Nephi 28:30) many times. Both the *Old Testament* and the *Book of Mormon* use this phrase to indicate that knowledge is attained “here a little and there a little” (Isaiah 28:10; 2 Nephi 28:30); and so it is with this work as well. Although each of the chapters to follow focuses on one of the four structuring elements of the *Symbolic System of Family*, the central themes of family and care are echoed in chapters three through nine. While this continual echoing of themes made dividing this work into separate chapters somewhat difficult, it actually reinforced my central premise that an ethic of care becomes a code of conduct, or a way of being for

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<sup>52</sup> This edict is not always followed or enforced however and Mormons have gotten themselves in trouble for doing proxy baptisms, especially for Jewish people. See *New York Times* article by Mark Oppenheimer on the posthumous baptism of Anne Frank.

<sup>53</sup> As an interesting side note, during my time with the Mormons I heard many stories of people who say that they “feel the presence” of those they do temple work for regardless of whether the person is an ancestor or a stranger.

Mormons. For the Mormons for whom their religion is a way of life, religious themes are consistently applied to every aspect of life as their ideology develops into ways of being and include an ethic of care and an expanded idea of family. Line upon line the theme is developed through the family unit, the Church, society, and the congregation which are the topics of chapters three through six.

Chapter three presents an historical review of the LDS Church and focuses on how the personal experiences of the religion's founder, Joseph Smith, helped shape the tradition's views on family and care. The goal of that chapter is to provide the reader with an historical and doctrinal context in order to better understand the place of care and family within the Church's history. Chapter three begins with a look at the general history of the Church and introduces Mormonism and its founder, Joseph Smith Jr. (hereafter referred to as Joseph Smith). It covers some of the personal tragedies of Joseph Smith and the early Mormons, including elements of death, persecution, and the trek west taken by this peculiar people. I lay out the mechanics of Mormon bureaucratic structures and lay leadership. Given that these structures are gerontocratic, gender issues are inherently part of this discussion. The chapter ends with a guided tour of a typical Sunday meeting block so even if the reader never has, or never will, step into an LDS Church they have an idea of what it is like to attend an LDS Sunday service.

Given the ubiquitous idea that families are the cornerstone of society and the LDS Church's claims that the disintegration of the family will bring calamities upon communities and nations (CJCLDS, 1995), chapter four considers general ideas about family and society. Because social and religious institutions are part of a bigger whole that is constantly trying to make meaning of its existence, this chapter takes a look at one slice of that meaning making process as it considers the place of family in society. I found that there is a strong connection between

Mormon and conservative sociologists' thought; therefore, this chapter presents discussions from those sociologists as a way of illuminating Mormon thought.

Chapters five and six lay the groundwork for my argument. Chapter five discusses the LDS Church and the ways in which care becomes codified through temple ritual and church callings. Chapter six looks at broad ideas about family and how ideas of family and kinship networks are tied to care. It begins with a look at the nuclear family then explores extended kinship networks, gender roles, marriage, and the human family. All of which are tools that Mormons use when beginning to construct their ideas of family.

Chapter seven considers how care for others is exhibited through social instances of care and volunteerism. As psychologists Kathryn A. Johnson, Adam B. Cohen, and Morris A. Okun point out, “people practice what is preached” (2013:850) and when service is preached, care for others is practiced. This chapter points to the way that Mormons see works (acts of service, care, and kindness) as a central part of their religion.<sup>54</sup> Care is at the heart of my model of the symbolic system of family, and at the heart of how Mormons think about family, kinship, and community. The goal of this chapter is to illustrate how care is the thread that binds all of these previously discussed elements together. Specifically, this chapter discusses how Mormons think about and codify care in terms of family and community. Chapter eight discusses what Mormons mean when they refer to their congregations as their *ward family* and also looks at the underside of *ward family* by examining who is left out or excluded. The concluding chapter summarizes the findings of this work and presents its significance, and suggestions for future work in the field.

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<sup>54</sup> “Works” is a term used by Mormons to refer to actions, or what an individual does as opposed to what an individual believes. Mormons use two scriptural references: the first found in the *New Testament* Matthew 7:16 which states in part: “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” The second, more important reference is from the *Book of Mormon*, Alma 41:3 which states: “And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good.”



## Chapter Two: Accessing Mormon Communities

### Hymn #252: Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel<sup>55</sup>

*Field notes: September 14, 2008. I am getting ready to attend a Mormon service this morning with a classmate as part of field research for one of my graduate classes. I have not yet chosen a religious tradition to focus on for my dissertation and I was hoping that this class would help me make that decision. We are often encouraged to look into a tradition that we have at least some personal experience with, but are free to choose any religious tradition we would like. I had toyed with the idea of focusing on Mormonism simply because it is so overlooked in social inquiry. Yet, in all honesty I wondered if the reason it was so overlooked was because there was little worth looking at. So I go with an eye to exploring possible topics, but proceed with caution; my previous personal experience with this group was not always positive and I strongly disagreed with much of the LDS doctrine. It was this last point that prompted me to officially leave the church years ago. This will be the first time I have attended a Mormon church since leaving.*

*I am nervous. There is a pile of old emotional baggage that I thought I ditched years ago suddenly very present. Baggage containing ideas about what it means to be a woman in that religious tradition, and now what it means to be not only unmarried, but twice divorced. I stop and wonder if this is really what I want to do; am I really ready to turn around and take a look at a religion I thought I had left far behind me? Maybe not, but I promised my friend I would take him with me; so I grab my car keys and head out the door. I have a headache.*

*I pick up my friend and we sit in the church parking lot watching people arrive for church as we discuss our thoughts about attending LDS services. My friend is curious about Mormonism, yet admits he would not have attended such a meeting alone. Looking at the other men arriving, he worries that his lack of a suit coat leaves him under-dressed. I assure him he will be just fine. I admit that I too am glad for the company and that I too may not have attended alone. I mention that although I am nervous about revisiting my past, I am curious about what twenty years away from the religion has done to my perception of the faith and its people. The fact that this particular meeting is not in Utah helps me distance myself from my past and allows me to begin anew in a way. I realize that approaching this religious tradition with a beginner's mind eases a lot of the personal tension I have been feeling all morning.*

*At that moment I decide that regardless of the religious tradition I choose to focus on I will have to leave all my personal religious baggage unclaimed at the luggage carousel and approach the faith and its people with an open heart and an open mind. After all, even though I realize I cannot help but insert myself into my work to some degree, my task is not to write my personal memoir, but to observe and then report how others live their religion. I remind myself that my journey is not as a spiritual seeker, but as a scholar. While quests of any sort are not*

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<sup>55</sup> LDS hymn #252 (CJCLDS, 1985). This hymn is listed under the topic of commitment this is not only a favorite LDS hymn, but reflects the distinctively LDS pioneer heritage of pushing handcart across the American prairies. It is a lively tune that invokes images of a happy work force, especially in the text in the first verse “put your shoulder to the wheel push along, do your duty with a heart full of song, we all have work, let no one shirk, put your shoulder to the wheel.” This element of work and duty may have been what the founders of the “Ordain (LDS). Women” movement wanted to emphasize as they used it as their closing song in their launch event April 5, 2013. Certainly I relate to the element of work as I began my research, and also felt a sense of duty to tell the personal stories of those I encountered with integrity and respect.

*always easy, they are always exciting! I still have a headache, but I take a deep breath and step out of the car; the quest begins.*

In this chapter I discuss the participant/observation method I used for my research as well as introduce the LDS congregations I observed. Returning to study the source of one's religious roots has the potential to both help and hinder the process. As illustrated in the field notes above, having a history and firsthand experience with a particular religious tradition usually means having some level of emotional reaction to that tradition. This can be a hindrance if not kept in check; yet, as other researchers have noted, having an emotional response to a tradition is often what leads us to see topics and patterns that may not be immediately obvious to the casual or uninitiated observer (Ingersoll, 2002).

#### Introduction

I am deeply influenced by the work and methodology of anthropologist Clifford Geertz and his approach to ethnography and exploring cultural meaning. Geertz borrows the term "thick description" (Geertz, 1973:6) from British philosopher Gilbert Ryle to describe the intellectual effort of doing field ethnography and the nuances and difficulties in exploring cultural meaning.

Assigning cultural meaning to observed events is part of qualitative research methodology and involves tools such as: participant/observation an insider/outsider's perspective, and conducting personal interviews. Geertz (1998) uses the phrase "deep hanging out," to signal that the process of participant/observation is a highly involved process that requires much more than passive or casual observation. Deep hanging out requires a significant commitment to spending time with those you have chosen to observe. This was especially true with Mormonism as the Church demands a lot of participation from its members.

In my field work deep hanging out included attending the three hour block of meetings which is the standard Sunday services each week. It also meant attending additional meetings such as Relief Society home making evening. This was a monthly meeting where a very simple dinner was served (often soup and salad) and the women participated in some kind of craft, or had a guest speaker. I attended monthly firesides. Firesides are more casual meetings where both men and women (or sometimes special focus groups such as young singles) attend to hear a guest speaker. Firesides are often held in the church building and take place on Saturday or Sunday evening. There were also special stake and ward conference meetings that were held on Saturday night once a quarter. Of course there were Christmas parties and summer barbeques; and bake sales held by the young women's groups where the entire ward showed up to purchase baked goods to help send the congregational girls to summer camp. In any given month there was at least one dinner held at a congregant's home where anywhere from two to fifteen people were invited to attend. These were casual gatherings and those who hosted such events tried to include different people each month. There were monthly adult gospel study classes, monthly group family home evenings for single adults, weekly yoga classes, and numerous baptisms. Additionally I sang in the ward choir, and often volunteered to help serve the local missionaries' lunch at the church when they had their quarterly area meetings. I served on the activities committee and helped plan ward parties, and I always volunteered to help set up and clean up afterward. There were monthly single adult outings and dinners, and of course the bi-annual General Conferences. In New Jersey I attended General Conference at the church building where it was broadcast via satellite TV, and in Utah I attended in person. Lastly, there was a weekly meeting with the missionaries. It was not possible to be assigned a calling, but I was able to accompany another woman when she did her visiting teaching once or twice. All of that was

included as part of my “deep hanging out” process, which of course was augmented with personal interviews.

### Qualitative Research

There are several ways to conduct a qualitative research project. Ethnographies and case studies are becoming a popular approach for anthropologists and sociologists. Ruth Behar’s 1996 work *The Vulnerable Observer* is an excellent example of this type of study. And of course, anthropologist Karen McCarthy Brown’s 1991 groundbreaking work *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* set the bar for the field. Sociologist Nancy Ammerman suggests direct observation when considering congregational studies (Ammerman et al. 1998), and anthropologist Clifford Geertz is known for his participant/observation methodology (Geertz, 1973), all use an ethnographic approach in their work. I too will take that approach and include participant/observation methodology.

### **Participant/Observation Methodology**

Geertz described his approach to qualitative field work as “deep hanging out” (1973:90). By this he meant that field work requires more than just casually attending religious services and passively observing the proceeding then reporting on your observations. Along with the list of activities described above, deep hanging out involves establishing rapport, observing public events, transcribing texts of interviews, keeping a field journal, reading supportive texts (such as magazine articles in LDS Church magazines) and listening to casual conversation.<sup>56</sup> The goal is to understand, as fully as possible, the “moods and motivations” (Geertz, 1973:90) of religious

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<sup>56</sup> In this era of virtual communities many researchers are also choosing to include internet sources such as blogs, Facebook, Google+ groups, etc. as a source of conversation and community. Although I chose to focus on face to face ethnography, I do include some of these sources, but consider them more as a side note rather than a primary source.

behavior. All of these elements are combined and enable the researcher to provide a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973:6) of complex social structures such as cultural context.

## **Interviews**

My work employed face to face ethnography and personal interviews. Using a carefully crafted list of interview questions I conducted individual interviews at participant’s homes or in public locations such as a sandwich shop. My preference was to meet in the person’s home, but some specifically asked to meet in another location which I accommodated. The interviews lasted anywhere between 30 minutes to three hours and participants did not receive any form of payment or compensation incentive. I normally conducted two or more interviews per day on the days I interviewed.

I conducted a total of forty-one individual interviews as a way of accessing personal narratives around the themes of family and church. Due to procedural delays in getting proper Internal Board Review clearance, I was only able to complete three interviews in New Jersey prior to moving to Utah to complete my field work and where I conducted the bulk of the interviews. All of those I interviewed were adults; the oldest was ninety-five and the youngest twenty-two. Although many of those interviewed in Utah commented on the great diversity of their ward, the majority (at least eighty percent) of the Mormons in the wards I observed were white.<sup>57</sup> My observations however, suggested more diversity in Utah than sociologists Rick Phillips and Ryan T. Cragun’s 2008 socio-demographic study (published in 2011) which showed that 95% of Mormons in Utah are white, and globally 91% of all Mormons are white (Phillips and Cragun, 2011:7). Therefore the racial/ethnic makeup of those I interviewed and observed is actually more diverse than the religion as a whole.

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<sup>57</sup> The only exception was a ward I visited near Irvington, New Jersey which was predominately black.

## Demographics

Given that LDS congregations are formed by geographic boundaries, the general nature of any congregation is that the majority of the congregants will share the same economic status. Although I attempted to include as much economic diversity as possible, the majority of those I interviewed were mostly lower middle class (working class) or below. As part of the participant/observer methodology, I lived in the same geographic area as 85% of those I interviewed.<sup>58</sup> This firsthand experience with the local economy coupled with information the interviewees disclosed in the course of the interviews gave me deeper knowledge about the economic status of the Mormons I interviewed. This again differs from Phillips and Cragun's overall portrait which stated that only 50% of all Mormons were lower or working class. Since Phillips and Cragun's study was an extensive quantitative project, I will assume their numbers are correct which means that overall Mormons are wealthier than my sampling would suggest. The tables below provide demographic information for only those I formally interviewed.<sup>59</sup> All of those I interviewed worked or were retired. Several, both men and women, worked more than one job, and all of the students worked while attending school.

<b>Income</b>	Poverty level Retired or student \$24,000 or less	Working class \$25,000 - \$60,000	Middle class \$60,000+
Men	3	14	1
Women	5	17	1

Table 2.1<sup>60</sup> Annual Individual Income of Interviewees

<sup>58</sup> I interviewed some who had been a member of my target congregation but had moved out of the ward's geographic region.

<sup>59</sup> The 2009 Pew report "A Portrait of Mormons in the U.S." showed that 26% of Mormons earned less than \$30,000 per year while the figure for the general population was 31%. The report also showed that 21% of Mormons (22% of the general population) earned between \$30,000 and \$50,000. This means that 47% of Mormons earn less than \$50,000. The figures for my target group are 95% earning less than \$60,000. The Pew report then showed that Mormons, overall, have a higher income than those I interviewed.

<sup>60</sup> Economic class figures were taken from U.S. News Money report "Where Do You Fall in the American Economic Class System?" by David Francis, Sept. 13, 2012. Classification is based solely on income and does not include elements of debt or liquid assets.

<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Remarried	TOTAL
Men	1	14	2	0	1	18
Women	2	16	3	2	0	23

Table 2.2 Marital Status

<b>Age</b>	20-30	30-50	50-80	80+
Men	2	6	8	2
Women	3	15	3	2

Table 2.3 Age

<b>Race</b>	White	Black	Hispanic
Men	16	2	0
Women	19	1	3

Table 2.4 Race

It was notable that people I interviewed in the Utah ward often expressed surprise at the large Hispanic population in the geographic area of the ward even though the actual Hispanic or Latino population was greater in the New Jersey ward area. The frequency of that comment in Utah made me wonder if the Latino presence was fairly new to this ward (area) and congregation. I had assumed that the Latino presence was not new to the geographical area given that the junk mail I received at my apartment (which was located in the ward) was in Spanish.<sup>61</sup> I also knew that there was a Spanish branch in the area (along with a Tongan branch) so Spanish speaking Mormons were not entirely new to the area.<sup>62</sup> Ultimately I wondered if it was simply the case that more Latinos were attending the English speaking ward rather than the Spanish speaking branch, and were therefore more visible than they may have been in the past. This

<sup>61</sup> Admittedly, it does not take long for junk mailers to target mail in certain areas.

<sup>62</sup> It is common to have branches (smaller than a ward) inside a ward boundary when the branch has been established to serve other language speakers. In the Salt Lake ward there was a Spanish branch and a Tongan branch.

suspicion was bore out one Sunday when a Hispanic man gave a talk in Sacrament meeting. He was visiting from the Spanish branch where he was a branch leader. In his comments he said that he had been a member of the Church for several decades, but that this was the first time he had addressed a congregation in English. So, it could be the case that having more Hispanic members in LDS English speaking wards was new. This would account for the perceived influx of Hispanic people in the ward even though they have been in the area for awhile.

	Lifelong member	Adult convert	Inactive
Men	13	5	0
Women	13	9	1

Table 2.5 Membership status

Since I was curious about the level of uniformity in belief and experience within the theme of family, I asked informants a set list of thirteen questions (the list of these questions is included in Appendix D). These questions were designed to discover if Mormons connect ideas about church, family, care, and service as part of internalizing or experiencing the idea of family. Interviews were structured around these questions, but respondents were also encouraged into further conversation and responses sometimes led to follow-up questions outside of the initial script.

## Themes

As I listened and re-listened to the interviews I paid close attention to what elements were taken for granted by the speaker--for instance that no one asked me to define what I meant by “family” or “church” before answering questions regarding these topics. In retrospect I see that there may have been some advantage if I had asked those I interviewed to define those terms for me. Ultimately however, their responses revealed their associations with the terms which disclosed how deeply they had internalized the terms “family” and “church.”



I also listened for ways church authorities and bureaucratic systems were used to legitimate responses to the interview questions. For instance, people would often add statements referencing what a speaker had said during General Conference which signaled that their response was not their idea alone, but in line with the ideas of church leaders. I also listened for what was not said. For example, I listened for the ways the speakers sidestepped around issues like actual temple ritual, the absence of women in the LDS leadership positions, or the tensions resulting from a narrow definition of family. In one instance one woman told me that she could not talk about what she did in her calling as a temple worker.

I listened for ways that identity was tied to gender and familial roles as supported by Church rhetoric. For example one woman told me that she felt that LDS women had a tendency to discount the strength and power they are born with. She said “some of the religions allow women to quote, unquote, hold the priesthood, but to be honest with you I think sometimes women in the LDS Church hold a higher power than the priesthood, the power that comes from things like motherhood.”<sup>63</sup>

Overall, I listened for key words that seem to pepper casual Mormon conversation; words like edify, manifest, and testament, and references such as Heavenly Father rather than God. While these words are not necessarily exclusive to Mormonism, they do have a certain application that layers the narrative with an LDS structure (Riessman, 1993:61).

### **Narrative Analysis**

The structure of narrative contains archetypal forms such as comedy, tragedy, romance, or satire that helps the narrator describe events (Riessman, 1993:19). I find that the structural form used by Mormons is one of religious entextualization (employing doctrinal discourse). That

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<sup>63</sup> Personal interview conducted July 6, 2012.

is--Mormons frame their narrative within LDS doctrine (which is often scriptural, in reference to temple ritual or the temple itself, or most often, in reference to general Mormon beliefs) or in ways supported by the words of LDS leaders (i.e. conference sermons). In this type of religious structure, plot lines are tied directly to LDS doctrine. For example they will tell a personal story then reference doctrine in some form which gives personal and religious meaning to the storyline.

Take for instance the story of a couple's granddaughter who was involved in a car accident. The story connects fatherhood with the LDS doctrine of fasting (which includes prayer) to obtain personal favor or blessings from God on the behalf of another. In this case the story is told as a third person narrative. It involves the couple's son and his daughter (blood relatives) and a stranger, making the text richly layered in reference to others. Church doctrine is included as a natural part of the narrative and not heavily underscored, yet is used to support the main storyline of how the son is a good father. Acting on Church doctrine in service to others is a natural part of many Mormons ordinary life. The following excerpt is part of the response to the interview question: "One of the LDS church's goals is to strengthen families – what does that mean to you?" The narrator told a story of how her son is a good dad, even though she does not get to see him often. Here is the original text.

Our granddaughter was turning her van into a driveway and this kid on a motorcycle slammed into the side of the van. The kid flew over the van and landed on his head. No helmet. And when our son got there he thought he should prepare himself for the possibility that the kid was fatally injured, so right away he started fasting. He fasted for three days. The kid walked away! He had stitches. He had long hair and that was the worst part of the accident is that they shaved his hair off – he was upset that they shaved it because he had been growing it for five years. So, that shows church in the family to me.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Personal interview conducted June 29, 2012.

Although on the surface it may not seem so, this is a surprisingly complicated and abstract narrative when one looks at it more closely. In this text what is not said is just as important as what is said, and only an insider/outsider's ear will be able to hear both in their proper contexts. As a way to unpack the elements of the story we can use a structural analysis of the text to illustrate these subtexts. Structural analysis uses six elements: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. Applying those elements, to the interview text reveals how the story is constructed and how the significant events are intrinsically interpreted (Riessman, 1993).

Unpacking the narrative we begin by noting that the narrator sets the stage with the first line giving an abstract of the story—the granddaughter is involved in an accident with a motorcycle; the accident appears to be the fault of the motorcycle driver rather than that of the granddaughter. The orientating details are the narrator's explanation of how the motorcycle driver “slammed into the side of her flew over the van and landed on his head. No helmet.”<sup>65</sup> Another important element of orientation is in the sub-text that the motorcycle driver had long hair. The presence of long hair on a man is often cited by Mormons as a clear indication that the man is either a non-member or a lapsed member. Only men with missionary style haircuts (well off the collar) are immediately recognized on sight as worthy LDS men. Conversely, a man cutting his long hair is seen as an indication that he has changed his life and his ways and is becoming more worthy (conforming more closely to orthodox Mormonism).<sup>66</sup> The inclusion of the detail that he had been growing his hair for five years indicates more strongly that he is a

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<sup>65</sup> Personal interview conducted June 29, 2012.

<sup>66</sup> A good example of this was given in another interview when the man commented “There isn't someone that has to tell some young man who has hair down to his, past his shoulder blades, which may or may not be that unusual in society, but for an LDS congregation that's more unusual, there's nobody that has to tell him to, “hey, if you want to attend here, cut your hair,” once he feels loved, accepted, and really needed, he modifies himself because he has found a culture in which he wants to be a part of and wants to fit in” (personal interview conducted June 30, 2012).

non-member rather than a lapsed member. As a non-member, the motorcycle driver is now seen as someone who is off of God's protective radar and in need of some sort of intercession on his behalf.

The complicating action is that the father of the girl driving the van (the narrator's granddaughter) is prepared for the accident to result in the death of the motorcycle driver; "and when our son got there he thought he should prepare himself for the possibility that the kid was fatally injured."<sup>67</sup> It is an unstated assumption that the granddaughter would either be implicated as being instrumental in the death of another, or at least be traumatized by the fact that she was involved in an accident that resulted in a fatality. This brings us to the evaluation--the significance and meaning of the son of the narrator's actions. By way of explaining what the son's actions were, the phrase, "right away he started fasting. He fasted for three days," gives us more details.<sup>68</sup> Fasting is part of LDS doctrine (in the same way paying tithing is doctrine) and is something that Mormons do on a monthly basis and when asking for special favors, insight, or direction from God. The belief is that fasting brings one closer to God and shows pure intent behind any special requests for divine intercession. We see that the son's action was immediate and unsolicited. He did the action "right away" and the lack of details telling us that the granddaughter or someone else asked him to intercede tells us he acted without prompting. This implies that the son's actions were natural and instinctive, perhaps even out of habit. We may even imagine that the action was above and beyond what was expected because it was directed toward the non-member motorcycle driver who may have put the granddaughter in danger, rather than the LDS granddaughter. By being noted, it implies that he had no duty to care for the man since he was outside both the community and the family of the son. The fact that the son's

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<sup>67</sup> Personal interview conducted June 29, 2012.

<sup>68</sup> Personal interview conducted June 29, 2012.

immediate reaction is to invoke the power of the fast on behalf of the motorcycle driver is the significant action.

The narrative's resolution is given in the details that "the kid walked away; he had stitches" indicating that for the narrator, the intervening action of the son (act of fasting) resolved the situation. This action, and the presumed response by God, saved the motorcycle driver's life, as well saved the granddaughter from any anguish she may have experienced if he had died. Lastly, we have the coda, returning the perspective to the present which is the last statement "so, that shows church in the family to me."<sup>69</sup> By unpacking all six narrative structures (abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda) within the context of LDS thought and practice we can see how church doctrine such as fasting is a natural part of many Mormons ordinary life and how church and family are connected.

Examining narrative in this way gave me insight into the "insider speak" of the Mormon culture. The ability to tease out the threads of the narrative in order to uncover the ways ritual (such as prayer), doctrine (such as the power of fasting), and culture (the fact it is a story about family) combine to form belief systems about family allowed me to observe how care is institutionally shaped and how ritual is prior to belief. Seeing how people care for each other is important, but in order to discover what that means to the individual and the congregation one must also understand the beliefs created by those acts of care. The only way to do discover those beliefs is to conduct interviews and analyze the transcripts.

### **The Analytical Rubric**

Once the data has been gathered, the task then becomes fitting all of the pieces together.

Establishing a framework for analysis, or an analytical rubric, is where all the individual pieces

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<sup>69</sup> Personal interview conducted June 29, 2012.

are gathered in order to address the project's overarching question(s). The practice of developing interpretive tools such as analytical rubrics varies from researcher to researcher. There is not a uniform rubric, nor standard set of procedures that all researchers employ, each develops his or her own based on the needs of the project or on their personal preferences (Riessman, 1993:54). For instance, in her book *Congregation & Community*, Ammerman constructs a framework based on what emerges through research rather than imposing a framework in advance (Ammerman, 1997:43). The lack of a standard set of procedures allows for a lot of flexibility. I believe this sort of flexibility is one of the strengths of interpretive and participatory methods within qualitative research methodology, but critics favoring quantitative methods find such flexibility suspect (Rabinowitz and Weseen, 2001).

#### Selecting Mormon Communities

I began the process of selecting Mormon communities as if I were a Mormon, which meant I would begin with the congregation I would have been assigned to as a member of the Church. As mentioned, Mormons do not “shop” for a local church to attend; they are assigned into a congregation based on their geographic location. As such, LDS congregations are not predicated upon the programs the church offers, nor the specific rhetoric, preaching style, or personality of the pastor. Mormon congregations are not able to attract new members by offering programs other Mormon communities do not; nor are they influenced by the presence of a specific leader. Instead, LDS congregants choose which ward to attend based solely on their location.<sup>70</sup> This makes looking at LDS congregations differ in ways from other congregational studies, where believers/members may choose their congregation (Edgell, 2006).

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<sup>70</sup> Although I have heard Mormons say that they visit a ward's Sunday services prior to committing to buying a home in an area as moving into the ward means becoming a member of the congregation.

Mormons are assigned to a home (or residential) ward based on two elements: 1) their physical address, and 2) the number of members in an area. The area of the ward will expand or contract as needed so that it includes a maximum of 500 members. In areas like Utah that have a large number of members, as well as a robust new housing market, this means that even though you stay in the same house, you can be shifted into a different ward. For instance, one woman I interviewed told me that she had lived in the same house for over thirty years, but had been in at least three different wards. The most striking example was when another woman told me that the ward boundary ran right through the center of her house; the renter in the front half of the duplex belonged to one ward, while she, living in the back half of the unit, belonged to another.<sup>71</sup> This means that the literal face and landscape of the LDS ward and congregation, is never static.

One way to find your “Assigned Residential Ward” is to access the LDS church website [www.Mormon.org](http://www.Mormon.org) and navigate through “Visit” and “Worship With Us” then enter your home address under “Find a Church Near You.” A screen will appear with your home address at the top and the address of the assigned ward beneath it with meeting times. Other nearby wards and alternative wards are also listed. Alternative wards are wards with language options other than English and young singles wards. You can click on the ward site for directions, the bishop’s name and phone number, and general information, but for things like newsletters, ward directory, calendar, and lesson schedules you must sign in which requires you to create an LDS account. Previously this meant an account required an LDS membership, but currently it is possible to create an LDS account as a non-member and thus have limited access to individual ward sites. If one has an LDS membership account the site offers more detailed information, such as a ward directory listing all the congregants’ contact information, for your assigned ward.

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<sup>71</sup> Personal conversation from August 28, 2012.

On one hand, the Mormon way of establishing wards makes choosing a particular LDS congregation easy—they are all formed the same way and none have any special attributes aside from physical location (which naturally includes all of the elements associated with a physical location such as economic factors, racial demographics, etc.). For example, people do not choose to belong to a congregation in Arizona because a congregant there is a famous writer, they attend because they live in the same area as the writer.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand choosing a congregation to observe is more difficult for those same reasons.

Using the system of beginning with my assigned ward, I found two wards that worked well for my research; one in New Jersey and one in Utah. I chose two wards that were radically different in many ways, yet the fact that they were LDS wards also meant they had some things in common such as shared lesson manuals, the same Sunday worship structure, and interestingly, about the same percentage of native Utahns (roughly 60%). Both of these wards/congregations will be discussed in more detail below. One of the interview questions was to ask what experiences the interviewee had with other wards/congregations. Those replies gave me a broader sense of LDS congregations and how the congregation the respondent was currently in compared with their experiences in other congregations.

### **Communities Included in This Research**

As I began spending time with Mormons I learned that any ward outside of Utah is considered to be “in the mission field.”<sup>73</sup> With this mindset the Mormons in areas outside of Utah are more

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<sup>72</sup> Stephanie Myer, who wrote the *Twilight* series is a Mormon, and lives in Arizona. I spoke with a man who happened to live in Myer’s ward and he stated that while people in the ward are a bit star struck, and other neighboring wards are a bit jealous, her presence/membership in his ward has not impacted Sunday Church attendance.

<sup>73</sup> The exception may be the “Mormon Belt” (Brooks, 2012) which is a swath of a large part of the Mormon population that begins in Idaho, extends down through Utah and curves down through southern California. The shape of this swath was most likely influenced by Brigham Young’s efforts to settle the area after the pioneers



focused on missionary work and take to heart the LDS leaders injunction that every member is a missionary (Holman, 2009). I felt the effects of this quite sharply as I was constantly pressured to convert while in New Jersey.

In Utah the members of the ward I chose to concentrate on were not nearly as concerned with my membership status. Missionaries came by only on rare occasions, and the bishop never asked to meet with me. Of course some members of the Utah ward were more focused on converting me than others, but for the most part while in Utah the pressure to convert all but completely dissipated. On the other hand, it was common in both areas for members of the congregations to make comments such as “oh, you’re just one of us;”<sup>74</sup> or “you’re just a dry Mormon”<sup>75</sup> meaning that they viewed me as being LDS although I had not been baptized. Often I saw such comments as an indicator of how well I had been accepted, other times I took it as a red flag warning that I may be mirroring the congregants too closely and am becoming too close to the “insider” margin of the insider/outsider paradigm.

In addition to the LDS communities I focused on, I felt that my work could be enhanced by including a counterpoint of comparative religion therefore I included a Reform-Conservative Jewish congregation also located in Salt Lake County, Utah in my field work. I chose that particular congregation as it was the closest geographic wise to the Salt Lake ward. I also chose Reform-Conservative Judaism because I have some family members who belong to that tradition who were able to help me with general questions and resource suggestions regarding that faith. I also saw some advantages in looking at a religious tradition that was seen as an ethnic group as well as a religious group.

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arrived in Utah. According to the 2009 Pew Forum Report “A Portrait of Mormons in the U.S.” 76% of the Mormon population is concentrated in the west and 35% of all American Mormons live in Utah (Pew Forum, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> Personal conversation dated February 7, 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Personal conversation dated June 29, 2012.

All of the Shabbat meetings I attended were open to the public; both members and non-members were welcome to attend. I conducted one interview with the rabbi at that congregation and informally spoke with several congregants. This exposure, along with literature in the field and previous exposure to other religious traditions, allowed me a deeper insight into the differences and similarities between Mormonism and LDS congregations and other faith traditions.

The table below provides basic demographic information for Morris County, New Jersey, and Salt Lake County, Utah. The number of LDS wards and stakes for each area are included to illustrate that the New Jersey area is smaller and less populated yet with very few LDS stakes and wards. Conversely, the Utah area is much larger with more people, but a large number of LDS stakes and wards.

	Morris County, New Jersey	Salt Lake County, Utah
Total square miles	460.18	742.28
2011 population estimate	494,976	1,048,985
No. of people per square mile	1,076	1,413
White racial majority	85.2%	89.4%
Number of LDS stakes <sup>76</sup>	1	170
Number of wards <sup>77</sup>	5-10	850-1,700

Table 2.6

Information from United States Census Bureau accessed Feb. 18, 2013 from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/34/3448300.html>

### *New Jersey*

The New Jersey ward was a suburban ward and most of the congregants were home owners.

Given the ward's location, many of the congregants worked on Wall Street, or for the very large pharmaceutical companies in the area, yet the congregation also included professional

<sup>76</sup> New Jersey only has five stakes in the entire state.

<sup>77</sup> The LDS Church does not provide data on the numbers of ward in each county. Most likely because that number is rather flexible and changes frequently. However, given that each stake contains a minimum of 5 wards and can contain as many as 10, a ballpark figure can be deduced from that standard. As mentioned earlier, only members have access to ward directories, so obtaining membership numbers that way is impossible for a non-member. I did as the congregation record keepers for accurate numbers and was told that the information was not available.

entertainers and sports figures. Many of the young single women (aged 18-25) were employed as nannies. The ward's most notable details were the wealthy congregants and the surprising number of Utah license plates on the high end luxury cars in the parking lot. It was not uncommon to see women in expensive furs during the winter months and high end luxury cars in the parking lot year round. Another sign of wealth was the way some carried out their ward assignments and volunteer work. For instance, when women were asked to bring a covered dish to a ward function, it was often the live- in nanny or other household staff that prepared and brought the food.<sup>78</sup>

Many of the New Jersey congregants were either originally from Utah, having been transferred to New Jersey for work, had family ties in Utah, or had attended BYU. Congregants were very proud to point out that they were a third or even fourth generation Mormons or that their ancestors were among the handcart pioneers that trekked west with Brigham Young.<sup>79</sup> Converts appeared to cherish these personal stories and seemed to seek them out. For instance I noticed that when someone was visiting from Utah, those who I recognized as recent converts (having personally attended their baptism) would seek the visitor out and want to talk to them about their experience of living in a place that had so much pioneer history.

I saw the New Jersey congregation's usefulness in the odd combination of being at the upper end of the economic spectrum and its garden variety LDS conventionality. The New Jersey ward also had good mix of life long members, and new converts. The geographic region was fairly large (encompassing several small cities) yet given the location (suburban rather than urban) the congregation was mostly white. However, a Latino branch was also part of the area and I attended Sunday services with that group (who were within the ward boundaries) on

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<sup>78</sup> I made this discovery when I volunteered to help in the kitchen for a ward pot-luck.

<sup>79</sup> This type of personal history sharing could be seen as a way of both emphasizing and constructing extended kinship networks.

occasion. This small Latino branch was included in all the ward parties (e.g. Christmas parties), stake and ward conferences, and all of the women in the branch attended the monthly Relief Society homemaking meeting with the larger congregation.

In some ways the New Jersey ward was much like any other LDS ward I had attended; mostly white, mostly married couples and young families, very few teenagers. Like many wards outside of Utah, the New Jersey ward boundaries are expansive and congregants are not always next door neighbors. Despite the fact that not all members live in the same neighborhood, there was still a certain level of homogeneity among members in terms of lifestyle, and worldview. While occasionally there are people that just didn't seem to fit, in, it was usually because they were visitors or investigators that were considering conversion rather than members of the congregation. In time however, even the investigators or new members ended up adjusting their appearance to fit in with the others.<sup>80</sup>

Mormons are often criticized for belonging to a “dress code” religion that insists upon proper attire for Sunday services. For Mormons, “dress matters” (Blakesley, 2009:41). While the definition of modest or appropriate attire is somewhat fluid, Mormons are generally careful to maintain a dress standard similar to that established for the LDS missionaries, and BYU students. This means more formal attire and subtle and or dark colors (dark suits for men and subtle colors for women). Church leaders often stress the importance of modest dress for women, which means covered shoulders, no low necklines, and no hemlines above the knee. In general, modest or proper attire is considered to be dresses or skirts for women, and dress pants with a white shirt and tie for men, a suit coat is considered best, but optional for men especially in the summer. More specifically, hair for men is to be collar length or shorter and conservative styles for

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<sup>80</sup> Investigators is the term Mormons use to describe non-members who are interested in learning more about their faith or people who the missionaries are teaching who have not yet been baptized.

women (meaning no extreme cuts or color). Women are to wear conservative makeup and no more than one pair of earrings (multiple ear piercings are forbidden). Tattoos or other body art for both men and women are strictly forbidden.<sup>81</sup> Children are expected to maintain the same standards and are often smaller versions of their parents with children as young as newborns in suits and ties.<sup>82</sup> Although I saw instances of dress outside of the standard, overall, in New Jersey more people were willing to adapt their dress to the LDS standard. I noticed that new members often initially came dressed in business or casual type of clothes, and women would often wear pants, but if they attended often they would adjust their wardrobe to a more professional or dressy standard in order to fit in. In talking to one new convert he commented on how he really enjoyed dressing up more for church since his baptism because it made him feel like he really belonged there.

### *Utah*

The Utah ward is situated in an inner-city urban area where most of the congregants were renters. The geographic area was small (less than five square miles) and included four high density apartment complexes. Given its location and availability of lower income housing the area attracts a lot of immigrants and refugees. At least one of the apartment complexes was part of “The Road Home” project which helps homeless families move out of the shelter and into more stable housing.<sup>83</sup> The level of poverty in the area meant that a large percentage of the people living in the ward boundaries (both Mormons and non-Mormons) needed welfare assistance. The need for assistance was so high that three sets of welfare missionaries were

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<sup>81</sup> Although these are the official standards, they are observed with a wide range of consistency. I saw many members dress in ways that were outside of the official standard, such as unnatural hair colors (both men and women), extreme hairstyles, tattoos, women in pants, and men in jeans.

<sup>82</sup> An excellent article detailing the history of Mormon dress can be found in Katie Clark Blakesley’s 2009 article “‘A Style of our Own’: Modesty and Mormon Women, 1951-2008.”

<sup>83</sup> See <http://www.theroadhome.org/> accessed April 23, 2013.

assigned to the ward in 2012. Welfare missionaries (always older adult couples serving a senior mission) assist the bishop in caring for the poor and needy, both members and non-members, within the ward boundaries, yet they themselves do not live in the ward.<sup>84</sup>

The Utah congregation had an eclectic mix in every sense of the word. At the other end of the economic spectrum from the New Jersey ward, this urban ward consists mostly of lower and working class individuals and families, yet the ward boundaries also include a section of nicer homes owned by middle class working professionals.

Unlike the New Jersey congregation that wore dressy “Sunday best” clothes to church, the Utah congregation reflected a wider range of dress. While many men in Utah wore the more conventional suits, others wore casual jeans. Likewise, while many women wore dresses or dressy skirts, there were some women who came to church pants, or even jeans. It was not uncommon to see people with tattoos, radical haircuts, long hair on men, or radically dyed hair. In the Salt Lake ward all were welcome regardless of what they wore; no one refused them at the door and no one rebuked them for their state of dress. I had heard stories that in other wards women were told specifically to either dress properly or stay home. Due to the fact that these women in the Salt Lake ward continued to attend church in jeans led me to assume that they had not received such an edict. Other observations bore this assumption out. One particularly stark example was the Sunday that a man who had previously served as bishop for the ward served the sacrament beside a young teen who was wearing worn jeans and a hoodie. In that instance not only was the young man accepted into Sunday services wearing something besides the LDS

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<sup>84</sup> Welfare missions are a special type of mission usually filled by retired couples. Missionaries for these types of missions do not have to leave their home for two years like the proselyting missionaries they live in their own home and work in areas not far from where they live. Service oriented missions for older couples are becoming more popular.

“dress code” norm, he participated in what was the most sacred part of the Sunday service for Mormons, the passing of the sacrament.

In Utah’s winter months it was also easier to identify the homeless that attended church as they dressed in many layers. In the very cold winter of 2012 I noted how many people came to church without proper coats, and that the coat racks always had plenty of bare hangers. I remember winters in the New Jersey ward where the coat racks were always full and an empty hanger was a rarity. I also noted that in Utah, a number of people did not have transportation of their own and were brought to church by other members or the welfare missionaries.

Some of the people I interviewed in the Utah congregation commented on how it was a bit of a “culture shock” coming to this ward after having been in other wards that were less ethnically and economically diverse. One couple commented:

F: There were people of all different stripes and I mean in stripes literally, striped hair, striped clothes, some no hair, all different colors, shapes, sizes, and I just, we looked at each other and said (long pause) ‘whaaaat is this?! Do we live in New York City?!’

M: But really, a better way to describe it is that the people were different. They looked a little bit different. But we’re not talking about skin color here. We’re talking...

F: Just the economic bracket was just very widely different.<sup>85</sup>

This couple’s comments illustrate that there was a rather large economic gap between the ward members who lived in the apartments and those who lived in single family homes. While the Utah ward was more ethnically and economically diverse than the New Jersey ward, it too consisted mostly of married couples (although in Utah most married couples were quite a bit younger), young families, and few teens (albeit more teens than the New Jersey ward).

Like any other inner-city congregation in large US cities, the Utah ward (geographic area) had its share of meth labs, violent crime, domestic violence, abuse, teen pregnancy, drug traffic and drug use, alcoholism, etc. During my first year living in the ward boundary, there

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<sup>85</sup> Personal interview conducted June 30, 2012.

were two murders, two sets of murder/suicide, several robberies, and one drug bust all within less than a mile from my front door.<sup>86</sup> I had come to expect that type of violence while living in Chicago, but was surprised to find it in a much smaller city in Utah. It was after I had moved out of my apartment that I learned that the building I had been living in, as well as another building in the apartment complex, had housed meth labs which had burned. A Utah congregant told me how the ward bishop had helped those displaced by the fire find temporary housing while repairs were being made.

Due to the large number of apartment complexes in the area, the congregation is very transient with at least one thousand people moving in and out of the ward boundaries each year.<sup>87</sup> Congregations that are transient are often difficult to maintain, lack cohesiveness and often fail (Ammerman, 1997:347). It was no surprise then when I learned this ward had nearly failed at one time due to lack of attendance. The Salt Lake ward, however, managed to bounce back. My guess is that the local clergy became more proactive about talking to people as well as more tolerant of the ebb and flow of members realizing that low attendance is often temporary. I also heard several stories of how the clergy made a concentrated effort to talk to new members and visitors the first day they came to church. And, there are times when the bishop will stand outside the chapel door and personally greet every person--an act that is highly unusual in LDS services, but very effective in making people feel welcome! Also, as mentioned above, the ward has responded positively to local welfare issues which has created a higher sense of *ward family* and cohesiveness which I will discuss in chapter six.

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<sup>86</sup> Through reliable sources I know that some of these crimes involved congregants although in the interest of protecting the group's right to privacy, I cannot reveal the details as those details would reveal the groups exact location.

<sup>87</sup> This figure was quoted to me from two different people who had served as ward clerk. The position of ward clerk is keeping track of members' records as well as physically counting people in the pews every Sunday.



Most LDS wards have about 300 members of which 100 to 150 are active. According to the Utah congregation's Elder's Quorum president (a priesthood leadership position) the Utah ward has about 500 members on its roles and of those 500, about 100 are active, so overall the ward has a higher than average rate of inactivity. Of the 500 members on the roles, there are about 60 single women. The man giving me these figures did not know how many single men there were. It is actually understandable that he would know how many single "sisters" there are and not how many single men since it is part of the Elder's Quorum president's job to make sure the needs of the adult single women in the ward are met. The logic is that the single women do not have the priesthood in their home, so the Elder's Quorum, and the church in general, is supposed to take care of their needs. Such needs would include giving the woman a blessing if she is sick, blessing her home, counseling with her on temporal or spiritual matters, but could also include things like helping her shovel her walks, mow her lawn, household repairs, etc.

In summary, there were two major differences between the two wards: the economic demographics, and the rate of people moving in and out of the ward. In New Jersey most congregants were homeowners and were gainfully employed, while in Utah very few congregants owned homes and many were either under-employed or unemployed. Both congregations experienced people moving in and out of the ward on a continual basis, although in New Jersey the rate of turnover was much less than in Utah. In New Jersey people moving in or out of the ward was due to the fact that some congregants (maybe ten to twenty individuals or families per year) were being trained at a local pharmaceutical company and were only in the area for a couple of years before being placed in permanent positions elsewhere. In Utah the turnover rate was directly related to the high number of apartments in the ward and the turnover was remarkable—the equivalent of the entire congregation moving and being replaced five times

over the course of a year. Although I did not spend a great deal of time with a lot of other LDS congregations, I judged that both the New Jersey and Utah congregations were representative of Mormons in general.

It should be noted that while there was never an overt reference to class systems within the New Jersey and Utah wards, there was always an underlying awareness of socio-economic standing. In the New Jersey ward there was a strong sense of upper middle class mentality that was reflected in the types of cars congregants drove and clothes worn to church, such as the presence of furs in the winter. In the Utah ward, class awareness was centered on types of residence. Those who owned homes were thought of as being more economically stable than those in the apartments.

#### *Other LDS Wards Visited*

I have made a concerted effort to attend diverse wards when possible as a way to contrast and compare them with the wards I selected for my focus. I attended a service in Newark, New Jersey in a rundown section of town where it was obvious that the congregants were struggling financially. At a ward near Irvington New Jersey I was struck by the fact that I was the only white woman there but noted that despite the predominately black congregation, the bishop was a white male. Seeing a white Bishop in this nearly all black church was a stark reminder of how racially homogeneous the LDS church is, and how few black men hold leadership positions. According to the 2009 Pew Report “A Portrait of Mormons in the U.S.,” 86% of Mormons are white, non-Hispanic compared to 71% of the general population. The 2008 socio-demographic study conducted by Phillips and Cragun discussed above gives a similar picture. That means that “nearly nine-in-ten Mormons in the U.S. (86%) are white” (Pew, 2009). Yet, having a white

bishop in a predominately black congregation prompted me to question the racist past of the LDS Church and its current cultural trend of seeing only white men as leaders.

I attended a small Spanish speaking branch in Morristown New Jersey, where there was so much hugging and laughter before the meeting that for a moment I thought I had stumbled into a Protestant coffee hour. The standard LDS insistence on “reverence” (chatting before and after services is kept to a minimum and then only in whispered tones) made this branch stand out in contrast. The congregants were curious as to why I would choose to attend the Spanish speaking branch rather than the regular ward. I explained that I was interested in getting to know them and also admitted to wanting to work on my Spanish. They were very happy to welcome me and were very willing to translate for me when I did not understand something from a sermon or lesson.

In Utah I attended services in a rural farming community where the congregation was made up of generations of families. It was hard to go unnoticed in a ward where children, parents, grandparents and great grandparents all worshiped together every Sunday. They warmly welcomed me and hoped I would return soon. I attended a “singles ward” in central Utah which was totally packed with approximately five hundred single adults between the ages of twenty-one and forty. There seemed to be a fairly equal amount of men and women in the younger age brackets, but as the age of the congregants increased the number of single women increased as well. There were very few older men yet quite a few older women. It was by far the quietest sacrament meeting I have ever attended! Even though chatting between adults before and after services in all wards is discouraged, in family wards during meetings there is plenty of noise generated by the large number of children present.

While traveling abroad I attended services in a beach community along Australia's Gold Coast. There was nothing unusual about the congregants there, but like the rural Utah farming community, the Australian congregation was very excited to welcome a visitor. In my conversation with the greeters I learned that the ward mission leaders were a couple who had a home not more than two miles from my apartment in Utah. Mormondom is indeed a small world.

The Australian services there were not notably different from any other I had attended and lessons even featured the ubiquitous mention of Utah Pioneers. Being a beach community and vacation resort along the Great Barrier Reef, it was not surprising that I was not the only foreign visitor. In Sunday school, I sat next to an LDS woman who was from New Zealand and was vacationing there just as I was. In the course of our conversation I discovered that she had converted to Mormonism within the last five years and this was also her first visit to Australia. We laughed at the way neither of us had known exactly what time the services started but assumed that if we found an LDS Church and showed up Sunday morning around 9:00AM chances were good that we would be able to attend services. We both just looked up the address of the church meeting house in the local phone book and simply showed up there Sunday morning. She told me that she had actually come directly from the airport and had left her luggage in the hallway. She said that she "knew that she would find someone in the ward that would give her a ride to her hotel after the meetings"<sup>88</sup> and she was right, several people offered to give her a lift to her hotel.

#### Locating the Researcher

As mentioned above, there are several debates in the field of sociology about the merits of qualitative versus quantitative research methods. Critics of qualitative research take issue with

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<sup>88</sup> Personal conversation dated August 21, 2011.

the inclusion and acknowledgement of the researcher's personal biases. They are uncomfortable with the fact that within participation/observation methods the line between researcher and subject becomes blurred. Some feel this blurring invites too much self-reflection on the part of the researcher and puts the researcher's loyalty and self-identity at risk. For instance researchers Marecek, Fine, and Kidder ask "how much do our own standpoints shape which stories we are told, which ones we are able to hear, which ones we take to be data, and which ones we don't" (Marecek, Fine, and Kidder, 2001:38)? There is also a question of ethics, which is one reason why universities establish and employ Internal Review Boards (IRB) which closely reviews research methodologies where human subjects, and tools such as interviews, are involved. Great care is often taken to prevent harm and minimize risk to the participants involved in any study. So, while the IRB cares for the participants, it is up to the individual researcher to negotiate the relationship between her and those she interviews. For me this meant that I paid close attention to my position as an insider/outsider.

### **Insider/Outsider**

I approach this work as an *insider/outsider*. This standpoint is a double edged sword—a liminal space of neither fully belonging, nor of being a total stranger. Such a position gives me certain advantages, but also has its drawbacks.

I was raised in Utah, in a very small, predominately Mormon community in the heart of Utah County, and was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at the customary age of eight. My family was minimally involved in the Church, and as my two younger siblings and I grew older, the less active in the Church my parents, and subsequently our family, became. As I grew into a teen I tried to conform to the LDS model of being a woman, but found it very restrictive.

I was always a bit of a forward thinker and remember writing my first war protest letters to U.S. senators when I was in the sixth grade. I was very interested in issues of race, sexuality, and gender and the social changes taking place around these issues as I grew up. The older I got the more troubled I became with the LDS Church's stance on these issues. Therefore, as an adult I went through the then arduous process of having my name removed from the church records and officially left the church in 1989 at the age of thirty. As I have told many pairs of Mormon missionaries, I grew up in the church, but the church did not grow up in me.

As much as I did not grow up with a deep belief of Mormonism, as a native Utahn I could never fully escape the cultural identity of Mormonism. It bothered me that people assumed that if I was from Utah I was also a Mormon. It was not until my days at Drew, when I had the privilege to sit in the classrooms of Karen McCarthy Brown, Otto Maduro, and Laurel Kearns, that I realized just how rich each of our religious *habitus* and cultural religious identities are, and how they contribute in so many ways to our overall identity. It was only after being exposed to great thinkers such as Durkheim, Bourdieu, Weber, and Berger who provided me with tools for framing religion and the religious experience that I was willing to return to examine my religious roots and cultural heritage.

In an interview with Bill Moyers, Joseph Campbell said that we can't fully understand or appreciate our own tradition until we have left it and then returned to consider it anew with the perspective of an outsider.<sup>89</sup> The standpoint of an insider/outsider has tensions in both directions. Taking on this role can be unsettling for the researcher when she resonates too closely with her subject, and yet becoming too distanced leaves one too far into the realm of the outsider.<sup>90</sup> Ammerman suggests that by establishing a distanced perspective the researcher can maintain a

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<sup>89</sup> See *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, with Bill Moyers, Vols. 1–6, 1988.

<sup>90</sup> Neitz, 2002:33

balance between self and insight into the group being studied. This perspective must include putting yourself in the place of a newcomer and experiencing the congregation as an outsider even though you may be well familiar with the group being studied. For instance she suggests “envision yourself as a first timer, a newcomer, a visitor to the church” or imagine yourself as someone of a “different race, socioeconomic class, region of the country, or faith tradition” (Ammerman et al., 1998:198). Although I felt as though I did a good job of paying attention to the group I was visiting, I found that her suggestion helped me be more aware of myself and how I was interacting with those I encountered, and my place as a non-believer.

American religious scholar Robert Orsi notes how the word *belief* carries with it heavy cultural baggage (Orsi, 2005:18). Sometimes it does not matter if we as researchers believe, the fact that we choose to study a certain group can be a point of contention with colleagues. This is illustrated by the experience of anthropologist Tanya Luhmann in her research with Evangelical groups. She describes a colleague at a dinner party who was aghast that she associated with that group and actually talked to them (Luhmann, 2013). The comment implies that not only are Evangelicals not worthy of serious scholarly study, they may not even be worth engaging in conversation. Frequently those who study religious traditions that are seen as something other than “mainstream” are often confronted with the derisive question “you don’t really believe all that stuff do you?”<sup>91</sup> And often even the possibility of our belief is cause for great concern.

Orsi relates the story of how attending a vodou celebration with Dr. Karen McCarthy Brown caused his Catholic mother to be gravely concerned for his spiritual safety and eternal welfare (Orsi, 2005:4-5). Personally I have had people caution me to take care lest I become “brain washed.” In one instance, a comment seemed to imply that possessing a level of belief indicated a lack of intelligence since “it’s all just nonsense and all Mormons want is your

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<sup>91</sup> From personal conversations.

money.”<sup>92</sup> On an academic level when I have discussed my topic with other sociologists at professional conferences, I often feel pressured to defend my choice to study Mormons while my peers who study other groups are never questioned about who they study and why in the same manner. I have also been told by other sociologists that by choosing Mormonism and not being a Mormon means I will never find work, as Mormon studies programs are funded by the LDS Church which only hires members, and there is very little interest in Mormonism otherwise. I am still not sure how to process or respond to all of that; I just know that this is a major growing religious tradition worth studying, and one that needs multiple types of researcher perspectives. Perhaps I just need to be a new kind of Mormon pioneer.

I think that at the core of all of the concern by others directed toward religious scholars is the fear that belief will change the person as well as personal relationships--there may be something to that. As Dr. Peter Savastano, one of my Drew professors once stated, “objectivity is a ruse”<sup>93</sup>—a noble goal, but a ruse nonetheless. Other professors have suggested that perhaps we move in and out of objectivity as our awareness of ourselves and others shifts. Both comments point to the fluidity of objectivity which is why we take great care to train ourselves to approach our studies with full self-awareness of our personal standpoint and to constantly be aware of where we end and our studies begin. As Orsi states, “we are not them, and they are not us” (2005:7) but we cannot see others as so unlike us that we cannot understand them. On the other hand, we cannot come to understand them so completely that we lose our academic discipline and ability for critical analysis. Maintaining this academic distance is especially difficult when a scholar examines their own religious tradition.

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<sup>92</sup> Personal conversation.

<sup>93</sup> Class notes.



As mentioned above I experienced far less pressure in Utah to convert than I did in New Jersey. Admittedly, in New Jersey most of the pressure to convert came from the Mormon missionaries, but there was always a bit of pressure from the congregants as well. In Utah I had less pressure on both fronts, from the missionaries and the ward members. Still, those who tried the hardest to convert me were the missionaries in both locations. During my time in Utah I kept bumping into one older missionary couple. They were always sweet to me and exhibited genuine interest in me and my work, yet, they were always pressing me to personally accept issues of LDS theology. For instance they would always ask if I had read the *Book of Mormon* and if I had prayed about it and found it to be “true.” It was apparent that they wanted to convince me of the “truthfulness” of the gospel (or Church doctrine) and always seemed disappointed that I was more interested in the social aspects of Mormonism rather than studying the *Book of Mormon*. I think one of the most telling moments, when I really realized that they assumed I was really more of an insider than an outsider, occurred in a particular exchange wherein I disclosed that I was engaged and living with my fiancé. Mormons frown upon pre-marital co-habitation and long engagements, and I could tell by the woman’s reaction that she expected that I would shun those activities as well.

I found that the place of insider/outsider in Mormon culture was more difficult than I had anticipated it would be. Initially I saw positive potential for such a standpoint, but I failed to see the possible pitfalls that arise from misunderstandings from both insiders and outsiders. As mentioned above, insiders did not always understand me as an outsider, and non-practicing members or “Jack Mormons”<sup>94</sup> did not understand my involvement with Mormonism. “Jack

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<sup>94</sup> Often people would actually self-identify and tell me “I’m really just a Jack Mormon.” Often this self-disclosure would be followed by a story of how they drink coffee, beer, or how their family has disowned them because they don’t believe anymore. They would also recount the ways that the LDS culture is so judgmental and closed and the ways it had rejected them. Rarely did these individuals cite doctrinal differences as the source of their non-believing.

Mormons” are people who were raised Mormon, and now are non-believers yet have never officially left the religion. These individuals keep their Mormon ties for various reasons, including apathy, but most do so because of their cultural or familial ties (e.g. they live in a predominately LDS area or still have family members who are practicing Mormons). I realized that some level of tension existed between LDS insiders and outsiders (including “Jack Mormons”), but found that the insiders were less antagonistic than outsiders.

I found that it was often the case that “Jack Mormons” are individuals who have had painful personal experiences with the Church doctrine such as heteronormativity or Church leaders. The voices of these prior members are often the most strident in criticizing the LDS Church and as a result, practicing Mormons have become wary and suspicious of this group. They are so suspicious that when they encounter someone like me who has left the church; they automatically assume I am going to ask difficult questions regarding church policy or church doctrine and challenge personal beliefs or the Church itself. I know this because they told me as much. I had more than one instance of finishing an interview and having the interviewee ask in a very relieved tone: “is that it? I thought for sure you were going to ask me tough questions about church doctrine!”<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, I asked one woman if I could interview her and told her I was looking at the idea of family within Mormonism. She visibly backed away from me and said “so, you’re looking at the place of women in Mormonism?”<sup>96</sup> Even after I assured her that was not the sole focus of my research she was skeptical and refused to be interviewed. Other

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Also, I found that the more rural and more predominately Mormon communities like Utah County had a greater instance of complaints about judgmental Mormons from both outsiders and Jack Mormons. Interestingly, this group will also predominately turn the conversation to money citing the LDS church policy of expecting a full ten percent tithe from its members as proof that all the church is really interested in is your money. I find this last point quite intriguing since general membership does not require paying a full tithe; it is only when Mormons want to gain access to the temple that they are required to pay a full tithe as part of proving their worthiness. In other words, many practicing Mormons do not pay a full tithe.

<sup>95</sup> Personal interview conducted June 29, 2012.

<sup>96</sup> Personal conversation.

experiences have initially felt more supportive of my research, but the undertones reveal how researchers can be “used.” The following is from my field notes taken in New Jersey.

*Last week after Relief Society while I was talking with Joan, a new member came up and started talking to us. In the course of introductions, asking what we all do, etc. the new member quickly discovered that I was a non-member, working on a PhD and focusing on Mormonism. I told her my focus was on the topics of Mormon family and community. I told her that I was interested in LDS congregations because they seemed to be very cohesive, almost like a family. She said that she was very happy to hear a non-member say that and admitted that when she hears such statements from members (or church leaders) she discounts it. She said she thought it would have much more impact coming from a non-member.*

There have been other similar exchanges where it was clear that the person I was talking to had personal reasons for having an interest in my work, or that they were attempting to steer me in a particular direction in order to use my research for their own gain. Such exchanges served to remind me of the underlying tensions between interviewer and interviewee and of the potential for misuse of power on both sides. I always returned to that moment in the church parking lot where I chose to focus on the religious tradition with an open heart and an open mind, yet mindful that I am a scholar of religion rather than a religious seeker. Keeping that focus helps protect my integrity as well as those I study. So, while there are plenty of pitfalls, trials, and challenges with doing a qualitative research project that involves deep hanging out in a religious tradition of my past, the rewards and discoveries make the journey well worth taking. In the next chapter I will take a look at the history of Mormonism and introduce the reader to some of the specific details that make Mormons a peculiar people.

### Chapter Three: Mormonism: A Brief History and Introduction

#### Hymn #30: Come, Come, Ye Saints.<sup>97</sup>

*I was pleased that the young couple I was sitting with had agreed to be interviewed for this project. I always enjoy talking with them and hearing them speak in meetings; their enthusiastic approach to Mormon doctrine is genuinely engaging. It is a hot day made hotter by climbing the three flights of stairs to get to their apartment, but inside it was cool and inviting. I was not surprised to find their walls decorated with copies of paintings I had seen in LDS chapels, as well as their wedding photo which was taken outside of the Salt Lake Temple. As we talk they both refer equally to their personal experience and Church doctrine, often popping into the next room to retrieve a book, or pausing to look up a scripture. Both are very articulate and passionate about their faith. At the end of the interview I ask if there is something they would like someone outside of Mormonism to know about them and their religion. The man replies “I think, for me, a lot of other religions believe that with the death of the disciples of Christ, that God no longer speaks to his children, that revelation, prophets, apostles, and personal revelation (are available to you) – you yourself can talk to God. The gospel of Jesus Christ, in its fullness, has been restored to the earth. It was restored through Joseph Smith who was called and ordained of God. We have prophets now just like in the Old Testament. Monson is a latter-day Moses. He speaks to God and reveals God’s will to us. God is not dead. God lives. God is not silent, he speaks to us today and he can and will speak to you, if you seek him out and learn of him.”<sup>98</sup>*

#### Introduction

For the Mormons I interviewed, having faith in LDS doctrine and teachings is a large part of their lived religious experience. In order to gain a better understanding of the LDS religion and culture, it is important to provide the reader with a background into LDS history, and a past steeped in themes of family and care. Therefore, in this chapter I discuss several elements of LDS history.

For many individuals who consider themselves religious, faith undergirds caring (Wuthnow, 1995:86). Sociologist Robert Wuthnow’s 1995 study *Learning to Care: Elementary Kindness in an Age of Indifference* found evidence that religion provides a moral authority for

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<sup>97</sup> LDS hymn #30 (CJCLDS, 1985). If any hymn could be classified as the LDS anthem, this would be it. It is one of the most loved of all LDS hymns and is known to bring tears to devout Mormons and those with Mormon pioneer heritage. The text tells the tale of the early pioneer trek into the west as they fled from persecution, of the trials on the way, and the many deaths the early Saints incurred. It could almost be a funeral march. The tempo is a slow yet strong, and is to be sung “with conviction” (CJCLDS, 1985).

<sup>98</sup> Personal interview conducted June 29, 2012.

care, and a framework that supports and legitimizes acts of care (83-86). While faith communities may not always inspire religious commitment “they help us remember our past, because they show us examples of how to be caring, and because they promote a lifestyle that works” (103). Religion becomes a framework for understanding the past; it also establishes a tradition which becomes part of a religious heritage. I found that for Mormons, like many other religious groups, themes of care and family are part of their religious tradition. Yet, in order to understand both the remarkable and the everydayness of Mormonism, it is important to gain an understanding of some key points about the religious history of Mormonism, and elements of Mormon theology.

As mentioned in chapter one, the theme of “line upon line; precept upon precept” (2Nephi 28:30) is a favorite *Book of Mormon* reference that illustrates the idea that knowledge is attained “here a little and there a little” (Isaiah 28:10; 2 Nephi 28:30). Knowledge about our reality is constructed in layers and is shaped by its cultural circumstances (Geertz, 1983:4). The demarcation between interpretation and experience become difficult to identify when considering culture and collective representations. Although the circumstances of a religious tradition often include a set of articulated prescriptions (e.g. the rules of religious doctrine) the culture of a lived religion hinges upon the interpretation of those rules (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]). In Mormonism, like many other religious traditions, the lines between doctrine and the culture are blurry at best. I found that both insiders and outsiders often have a hard time distinguishing between what is doctrine-- and what has developed as a cultural habit.

Several times during the interview process people made sure I knew that not everything Mormons appear to practice is based in doctrine. For example, in several interviews the conversation turned to the cultural habit of being overly focused on getting married at a young

age. One man talked about his experience in a BYU singles ward and said that singles' wards were far too focused on getting people married and it created a lot of stress. Another woman emphasized the difference between the importance of establishing one's own family and the cultural habit of getting married very young:

I had a thought that came to mind that we didn't really talk about. I wanted to mention the difference between the gospel and actual teachings versus the culture. People, especially outside of the Church, look at us and they sometimes can't differentiate between the two. I'm talking about how one aspect of the culture of the gospel is to get married very young. Missionaries are encouraged to marry very soon after returning home. It doesn't necessarily mean date someone and get married two weeks later, but that does happen. But, because families are such an important stage of life and focus of the church, the culture gets skewed into 'get married now.' I find that a lot of people get married without having the proper courtship time. They don't get enough time to truly know each other. I think that is contributing to a lot of people getting divorced, and divorce is a terrible thing.<sup>99</sup>

The length of this quote indicates how frustrated this woman is at misunderstandings toward marriage. Outsiders see that so many Mormons marry young and assume that marrying young must be a "Mormon thing," or, in other words, Church doctrine or Church mandated. Mormons themselves misinterpret an encouragement to begin their own families as an edict to marry very young and very quickly (very short engagements).<sup>100</sup> As the woman points out, marrying both too young and too quickly often has negative results. Of course this woman is making generalizations and is expressing her own feelings about the cultural practice of marrying young. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that marrying very young without a long courtship period always has negative consequences, or that all Mormons feel the same way as this interviewee.

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<sup>99</sup> Personal interview conducted June 29, 2012.

<sup>100</sup> In Utah County especially it is not uncommon for a man to return from a mission, start dating, get engaged, get married, and perhaps even have his first child within a year's time. Stories of couples getting engaged after the third date are not uncommon.

Throughout the interviews, I heard repeatedly that the ways people interpret and live their religion is very personal, and that living according to Church doctrine (e.g. keeping certain codes of conduct), is always an individual choice. I heard the statement “people are people” many times and was often reminded that not all Mormons live the doctrinal principles in the same way. Several people told me that the Church provides the tools, how they are used is up to the individual. The first step then, is to understand the tools.

### Mormonism: A Restored Gospel

As indicated in the story this chapter opens with, the belief that the LDS church is a restored gospel is very important to Mormons. At the end of my interviews I would ask people to tell me what they wanted others to know about Mormonism; the most often-mentioned responses were that they wanted people to know that they belonged to a restored church of Christ, and that they were Christian.

When Mormons refer to a “restored church” or Mormonism as a “restored gospel” they are pointing to the LDS belief that when Christ died, Christianity became splintered and yet was made whole again, restored, to its original state when Joseph Smith established the LDS Church. Mormon missionary discussions are often aimed at instructing potential converts about the topic of gospel restoration which they often refer to as the “fullness of the gospel” (CJCLDS, 2004:7).

To illustrate this concept the missionaries may offer a metaphor of a glass vase shattering—as the glass breaks pieces are scattered and then subsequently gathered by various individuals. Each piece on its own is important, for it is only when all the pieces are gathered together again that the vase can be restored to its original state. Conversely, while each piece is important, one piece alone is not enough, all the pieces are needed. For Mormons the vase represents the whole gospel as Christ initially presented it. The shattering of the metaphorical

vase is the ways that the different Christian religious traditions interpreted that original gospel after Christ died. But further, Mormons believe that none of the other Christian traditions really had a grasp on the entire gospel; they did not realize their fragment was only a piece of a larger whole. One of the crucial missing pieces that none of the other churches have is the scriptural text *The Book of Mormon*.

Mormons believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet who restored the gospel, in part, by translating the *Book of Mormon* from a set of golden plates which had lain buried in a hill in upstate New York for centuries. Mormons hold that an angel led Smith to the plates and gave him the tools necessary to translate them from ancient “Reformed Egyptian” into English (Shipps, 1985:9).<sup>101</sup> The missionary’s metaphor of the shattered vase provides Mormons with a tool to help explain how the gospel was restored and why it needed elements such as Joseph Smith, and the *Book of Mormon*. It also explains why all religions have some “truth” to them. Amateur cultural historian Samuel Brown noted that for both believers and non-believers this explanation of Mormonism describes how Smith took fragmented pieces from the world around him and assembled them together in his new, or restored, religion (Brown, 2012:307). Most scholars, however, do not agree with the LDS claim that the Mormon gospel is a restored gospel; historian Thomas O’Dea (1957) stated that Mormonism was not unique, or new, and actually closely resembled other religious movements of Joseph Smith’s time in the burned-over district of upstate New York.

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<sup>101</sup> In addition to being divinely led, Smith used a Urim and Thummim, two special “seer” stones held together much like spectacles to translate the “Reformed Egyptian” that *The Book of Mormon* was originally written in into modern English (Shipps, 1985:9-18).



### **Burned-over District**

O'Dea noted that “the appearance of the Mormon Church was neither unprecedented nor unique in many respects, for it was one of many religious bodies founded in the region south of the Great Lakes in the first half of the last century” (O'Dea, 1957:7). He claimed that of those new religious bodies, the holiness movements (which would blossom into Pentecostalism), Seventh-day Adventist, and Mormonism were among the more successful innovations of that time. A major difference between the LDS Church and these other religions was that Mormonism was not a Protestant splinter group, but a new religion entirely, a claim that is tricky for Mormons since they see their religion as *restored* rather than *new* (Conkin, 1997:162). Religious historian Paul Conkin cited distinctive LDS doctrine and the appearance of the *Book of Mormon* as elements that make the LDS church stand “so far apart from all other Christian denominations as to constitute a completely new religious tradition” (ibid).

In sociologist Michael Palmer's 1982 dissertation “A Welded Link: Family Imagery in Mormonism and American Culture,” he noted that “Smith and his associates thought of themselves as forming a church. But the term ‘church’ in English can refer to anything from a worldwide organization to a one-room building” (86). Palmer claimed that Smith's goal was to restore the unity of an authoritative church. Palmer stated that, claiming authority for himself, Smith set out to “teach pure doctrine and administer the sacraments in an orderly manner” (87) amid the social transformations that characterized Jacksonian America.

Many of America's early religious patterns were inherited from Europe and Britain as immigrants made their way west in the early eighteenth century, and religious groups such as Shakers, Catholics, and Jews helped created a religiously pluralistic society (Brooke 1996 [1994]; Backman 1970:135). Historians differ on their views; Whitney Cross roots Mormonism

in the Puritan culture of New England, while John Brooke holds that Mormonism springs from the most extreme fringe of the sectarian tradition of the Radical Reformation (Cross 1950; Brooke 1996 [1994]: xv). Historian Jon Butler proposed that “we attach less importance to Puritanism as the major force in shaping religion in America and more importance to the religious eclectic that has long been prominent” (Butler 1990:2). While I agree with those views to a point, my findings support the standpoint of sociologist Tim B. Heaton.

Mormon sociologist Heaton found a connection between the Mormon theology of family (that families are an eternal unit) and Puritan family morality (1988:107). He noted that adhering to strict laws of chastity before marriage, and observing sexual codes of conduct after marriage (sexual relations that produce children), were the puritanical elements that underpinned marriage as the only legitimate arena for sexual expression. This codified sexual expression combined with the LDS theology of celestial (temple) marriage solidified family-focused behaviors as a social and normative structure for the Mormon culture (Heaton, 1988:116-119). It would be a mistake however to assume that Mormons were the only group influenced by puritanical elements. The Puritan emphasis on family, specifically patriarchal authority, greatly influenced political theory and social leadership in the United States. Cultural historians Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg noted in their 1987 work, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* that Puritans did not think of the family as a private unit, but as an integral part of the larger political and social world. For them, family was the “Mother Hive, out of which both those swarms of State and Church, issued forth” (4-5). Certainly that line of thought is still at work in modern society.

Recognizing that the Puritan emphasis on family influenced Joseph Smith’s approach to family and patriarchy is fairly intuitive; recognizing the importance of temple ritual binding

families together is not as readily apparent. Why would Smith feel such a strong need for ritual that would ensure that families were together in the afterlife? One would be well justified in asking why, if you believe in an afterlife, would you believe that you would be there alone? Understanding why Smith felt a need to codify familial relationships through temple ritual helps us understand the Mormon focus on family. But first, in order to understand temple ritual, one must first understand how Joseph Smith was personally affected by the deaths of those around him.

### **The Impact of Death**

As mortals, death is always problematic for us, but for Joseph Smith it was particularly troublesome. Like every other preacher of his day, Smith was concerned with infant baptism, the fall of man, the atonement, resurrection, and eternal punishment (Cross, 1950:145). But Smith was further troubled by his personal experiences with death. His unique approach in dealing with death is what, I believe, lies at the heart of LDS temple ritual concerning family. Brown takes this idea one step further and claims that Smith's attempt to conquer death is at the heart of the religion (Brown, 2012).

Brown pointed to an 1844 sermon (often referred to as the King Follett sermon) given by Smith which commemorated the death of a Mormon elder King Follett a friend of Smith's killed in an accident, wherein Smith told his followers that he would open their eyes regarding their dead (2012:5). In that sermon Smith talks about the nature of God as an exalted man (that God was once was a human man, that human men can become gods, that God organized matter rather than created the world from nothing) and just as God and his son Jesus Christ died and rose again, so will all of humankind. Smith emphasized how comforting it is to mourners to know that their loved one lives on in immortal glory (Smith, 1971). Although Brown is a medical doctor

and not a sociologist, he is correct in thinking that there must be a link between Smith's ideas about death and his sermons regarding salvation.

Religious scholar Douglas J. Davies argued that by way of Joseph Smith, Mormonism has “developed its distinctive means of death conquest as part of the ritual process of exaltation” (2000:65). Davies pointed out that prophets (including Joseph Smith) are often seen only in terms of the ways in which they voice the concerns of their peers. While he acknowledged that Smith did indeed do that, Davies emphasized that Smith was also acting on his own personal needs and experience (2000:100).

Smith is a product of his time as well as his circumstance. In his time, the early 1800s, infant mortality rates were high and life was hard. In 1813, many people in Vermont and New Hampshire, the area in which the Smiths lived at the time, died from typhus. All of the Smith children, including Joseph, contracted the disease, yet amazingly none of the Smith children died as a result. A favorite anecdote that Mormons like to tell of their founding prophet is that after recovering from typhus, (so the story goes) Joseph had a bone infection. Doctors wanted to amputate the then seven-year-old's leg, but his mother refused instead opting for a very painful procedure that involved removing the infected part of the bone. Joseph, “in an amazing show of will and stamina” (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:21), refused strong liquor to dull the pain.<sup>102</sup> Smith apparently made a full recovery once the infection was removed.

Naturally, Smith was touched by the deaths of many close to him, but he was especially affected by the death of his oldest sibling, Alvin. Alvin was born in 1798 to Joseph Sr. and Lucy

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<sup>102</sup> Mormons especially like to point to young Joseph's refusal of strong liquor as evidence of trust in God and a divine foreshadowing of the word of wisdom, which strictly prohibits the use of alcohol. Additionally, the story is used to illustrate a mother's trust in God and a willingness to do whatever is necessary for her child. This last interpretation was retold in an October 2010 General Conference sermon “Stay on the Path” given by Primary President Rosemary M. Wixom. See <http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2010/10/stay-on-the-path?lang=eng> accessed February 4, 2013.

Mack Smith.<sup>103</sup> Joseph Jr. was born in 1805, the fifth of eleven children (CJCLDS, 2003 [1989]:21).<sup>104</sup> He was very close to his family and siblings, but he especially idolized his older brother Alvin. Joseph Sr. was less than the ideal father. He drank to excess, was involved in nefarious deeds such as counterfeiting, treasure divining, and questionable trading, banking, and real estate ventures (Brooke, 1996 [1994]: 138-39; Brodie, 1995 [1971]:6 -7, 20, 88). It was no wonder then that by the time Alvin was in his early twenties he had taken over as head of the family and began overseeing the family's finances, although by that time they were nearly in ruins (Bowman, 2012:15). Besides looking up to Alvin as a father figure, Joseph also looked to Alvin as a friend and a supporter for his religious ideas. Although Alvin himself was not a religious man, as the oldest son, Alvin was considered by his family to be the family's prophet and seer. That may have been the reason that Alvin was the person who took the most interest in his younger brother Joseph's visions (Quinn, 1998:159).

In 1823, just three years after Joseph's first vision, Alvin died unexpectedly at the age of 25 from what may have been appendicitis (Brown, 2012:24). This death affected Smith and his family deeply on several levels. Alvin had been his mother's favorite son, and, as mentioned above, he had been acting as the head of the family for some time (Brown, 2012:23). Upon his death, family gatherings ceased and family financial pressures increased (Bushman, 2005:46, Bowman, 2012:15).<sup>105</sup> Those elements alone were devastating, but events at Alvin's funeral were

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<sup>103</sup> There were actually a total of eleven children; only nine lived past infancy. The first was born prematurely in 1797 and died shortly after birth; another born in 1810 lived only eleven days (Allen and Leonard, 1992 [1976]:21).

<sup>104</sup> 1805 was just four years after the Cane Ridge camp meeting which meant that Smith lived in a culture rife with religious fervor. That meeting is seen by literary and cultural critic Harold Bloom as an important event in the American revival tradition (Bloom, 2006 [1992]:47). Some cite this event as the beginning of the second great awakening although other historians such as Jon Butler question the term and the significance of the events at the time they happened, instead placing emphasis on the subsequent analysis of such events (Butler, 1990:164-65).

<sup>105</sup> Joseph Smith Sr. had lost all of the family's money in poor business decisions and had lost the farm he owned in Vermont. Because they could not afford their own land and were forced to rent, the family moved often. Joseph Smith Sr.'s love of wine added to the problems, and by 1821 Smith Sr. had put Alvin in charge of all family matters (Bushman, 2005:42; Brodie, 1995 [1971]:10).

perhaps the most crucial elements with regard to what would become the LDS ritual of baptizing the dead. As mentioned above Alvin was not a religious man and had never been baptized. These facts prompted the minister delivering Alvin's funeral sermon to declare that Alvin's soul was bound for hell (Brodie, 1995 [1971]:27-28, Bowman, 2012:15). This, along with the actual death, troubled Joseph so deeply that he never fully recovered from the loss of his brother (Brown, 2012:35).

In 1828, two years before Smith officially organized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, his firstborn child, named after his beloved brother Alvin, was born very much deformed and died shortly after birth. In 1831 Smith's newborn twins, Thaddeus and Louisa, also died soon after birth (Brooke, 1996 [1994]:214). By tragic coincidence a neighbor had also had twins about the same time and had died giving birth; Smith and his wife Emma were briefly consoled by adopting those newborn twins (Kelly, 2000:83). Death arrived yet again when one of the twins died one year later in 1832 from an unnamed illness.<sup>106</sup> In a period of less than ten years, Smith lost his beloved brother and four of his own children. A final tragedy would come in 1838 that would further define not only Smith, but the Mormon people as a whole, in an event referred to as the Haun's Mill massacre.

The early saints had moved as a group several times, searching for a place they could settle together as a collective of believers. Trouble and persecution seemed to be escalating as they moved into Missouri. A series of events led up to the horrific disaster at Haun's Mill. There was financial trouble, bad debts, a failed attempt to establish a private bank, and several lawsuits, all involving Smith directly and his followers indirectly by association.<sup>107</sup> This created tension

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<sup>106</sup> Brooke and others do not give exact details about these deaths, only to suggest that medical knowledge and services were, at best, limited.

<sup>107</sup> Although much disputed by the LDS Church, an excellent historical look at these events can be found in Fawn Brodie's work *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* first published in 1971.

between Mormons and their neighbors which escalated to such a point that they were driven out of Missouri. Missouri's Governor, Lilburn Boggs's, had issued an order stating that Mormons should be treated as enemies and either driven from the state or exterminated (O'Dea, 1957:47).<sup>108</sup> In response, Smith built a militia he dubbed the "Armies of Israel" (O'Dea, 1957:46) which was said to consist of nearly 800 men. Such an edict and the presence of a Mormon militia escalated the already tense situation.

The Mormons had been persecuted for years, having been driven out of every settlement they attempted to establish; at the time of the massacre, the main body of the Mormons had gathered in Missouri. Skirmishes between Boggs' and Smith's men broke out on a regular basis, but seemed to hit a fevered pitch in October, 1838. On October 29 Mormon scouts discovered a large body of troops headed toward the nearly deserted Mormon village of Far West where the flour mill owned by Jacob Haun stood. Reports from a wounded Mormon man who happened to escape, state that nearly 200 men attacked Haun's Mill armed with guns and Boggs' extermination order.

The Mormons had fled into the blacksmith shop, which they thought would make an admirable fort, but it had proved instead to be a slaughterhouse. Great cracks yawned between the logs of the shop, and the Missourians, hiding behind trees, picked off the Mormons at their leisure as if they had been killing cattle in a pen. When the women fled toward the brush, the men shot at them in derision. Old Thomas McBride fell wounded and surrendered his gun, whereupon one of the mob coolly hacked him to pieces with a corn-cutter. After shooting down every Mormon they could see, the mob entered the blacksmith shop to finish off the wounded. They found nine-year-old Sardius Smith hiding under the bellows. His younger brother, shot through the hip pretending to be dead, heard the men drag Sardius out from his hiding-place. "Don't shoot," said one militiaman, "it's just a boy." "It's best to hive them when we can. Nits will make lice," a man replied, and placing his rifle near the boy's head, blew out his brains (Brodie, 1995 [1971]:237).<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> This is the only time in U.S. history that a government official has issued an extermination order against a religious group.

<sup>109</sup> There is no mention of Sardius being related to Joseph Smith.

This brutal attack, in which at least 17 people including women and children were killed, was difficult on Smith. He noted years later that some men disobeyed his orders to abandon their property and leave the area, a decision which cost them their lives (Smith, 1978 vol. 5:137). The event also devastated the Mormon group as a whole; as a result, they left Missouri during the winter and following spring.

Just two years before the massacre, Smith reported seeing his brother Alvin in a vision of heaven even though Alvin had died unbaptized and so should not be allowed into heaven (Smith, 1978 vol. 2:380). In this vision Smith heard the voice of God telling him that all people will be judged according to their works and the desire of their hearts (*ibid*). This is perhaps the first hint of temple baptismal ritual that would be established four years later. While hints such as this illustrate that life after death was something Smith put a lot of thought into prior to the massacre, it was perhaps the Haun's Mill incident that was the final impetus compelling Smith to resolve the tension the tragedy and previous family deaths had in their wake. While scholars like Douglas Davies (2000) note the significant impact death had on Smith personally, most historians do not make a direct correlation between these deaths and the innovation of temple ritual. I suspect that this may be due to the fact that many historians writing about Mormonism are themselves Mormon and so focus on events like Smith's visions as the impetus for temple ritual rather than sociological events and circumstances. I am among those, like Davies, who see a more tangible connection between Smith's personal loss and LDS temple ritual.

In 1840 Smith announced the temple rite of baptism for the dead, which provides salvation to ancestors and children who died prior to baptism—a rite that helped bind families together as Christians (Brown, 2012). It was also a rite that insured family members would be united in the afterlife, making the family unit itself transcendent of space and time. Such rites



have been and continue to be a comfort to Mormons in the face of death and loss of loved ones. I will return to discuss the practice of baptism for the dead and other temple rites in chapter five.

In all of the elements just discussed, order and obedience are fundamental components of Mormon culture and of Smith's new religion. While there is strong evidence that Smith's interest in temple ritual was driven by personal loss, there is no question that Smith was determined to establish a "restored" Christian religion. Many, however, still question whether Mormonism is actually a valid form of Christianity.

### **Christian Identity**

Are Mormons Christian? Historian Jan Shipps says this is a complicated question (Shipps, 2001 [1994]:76). Although many claim that Mormon theology concerning the nature of God (a God who once had a mortal body) wanders far enough from the standard Christian definition of God and the Godhead (a three in one divine trinity) as to warrant it non-Christian, Mormons strongly and proudly claim that they are Christians.

In LDS belief there are three separate beings that make up the godhead (God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost), rather than the three-in-one monotheistic Trinitarian model; this belief places Mormonism squarely within polytheism. Further, belief that God the Father is an embodied being, and that worthy Mormons will themselves become gods, much in the same way children grow up to become parents, places Mormons outside of the definition of Christian. Sociologist of religion James T. Duke, who is himself a Mormon, states that such major theological differences between the LDS Church and other Christian churches are substantial enough to warrant labeling the LDS church as other than Christian, although in practice, Mormons could still be considered Christian (Duke, 1998:82). Church apostle Jeffrey R. Holland agrees on both counts. In the October 2007 General Conference, Holland stated that it is accurate

to say that Mormons are not Christian based on their view of the Godhead. But, it is also accurate to state that Mormons live by the teachings of Christ and are therefore Christian through practice (Holland, 2007). That is not to say that Mormons do not bristle at the prospect of being labeled non-Christian.

Most Mormons do not understand why they are not considered to be Christians and stridently proclaim that they are because they follow Christ. They routinely point to the fact that Jesus Christ is in the name of their church as proof of being Christian. As mentioned above, a common response to my question regarding what my interviewees would like others to know about them is that they are Christian. So, as Duke pointed out, while Mormons are not theologically Christian by definition, they believe they are by practice, meaning that they see themselves behaving in a Christian manner and believe Christ to be the head of their church. A young married woman explained that Mormons are Christians because “Christ is the head of our church and we trust our leaders because they are led by him (Christ).”<sup>110</sup>

According to a Pew Forum report, “The Global Religious Landscape,” Mormons are counted as “people who belong to other traditions that view themselves as Christian (including Christian Scientists, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses) make up about 1% of the global Christian population” (Pew Forum, 2012b). A Pew Forum Poll found that about half of U.S. adults say that Mormonism is a Christian religion, yet nearly one third say it is not, while the remaining are unsure.<sup>111</sup>

I agree with anthropologist Fenella Cannell, who stated in her 2005 work “The Christianity of Anthropology,” that anyone who seriously describes him/herself as a Christian can (maybe even should) be counted as such because “to proceed otherwise is to pre-judge what

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<sup>110</sup> Personal interview conducted August 25, 2012.

<sup>111</sup> Pew poll “Mormons in American – Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society, January 12, 2012.

the content of a religion might be on the basis of highly selective, and historically particular, canons of orthodoxy” (349). In her fieldwork-based examination of Mormonism, Cannell found that although Mormonism is deeply Christocentric, LDS beliefs certainly go far beyond what most Christians would recognize” (ibid). She noted that while what she calls “orthodox Christianity” (ibid) places family and kinship networks in the temporal earthly realm, “Mormons see eternal kinship as the distinguishing feature of divine status in heaven. Kinship is humanity’s divine destiny” (ibid). This view of humanity and kinship then does seem to set the Mormons apart.

### The Mormon People

This section provides the reader with a deeper understanding of what it means to be a Mormon. Mormons often recognize that their approach to family makes them different in some ways. I ask Natasha, a woman with teenage boys, if she thinks Mormon families are unique in some way. She laughs and says “well, we are a peculiar people! You see some families who just seem to stick out and they don’t care. They’ve got their own thing, and I think that is a strong family unit.”<sup>112</sup> Within the lived experience of Mormonism, belief in the LDS Church means adopting a unique identity, and adhering to codes of conduct. The theme of family is subtle in some of these aspects, and at the forefront in others. What was most striking to me was how the Mormons I interviewed seemed to fully immerse themselves in their religious identity.

Mormons have often been described, by others as well as themselves, as a peculiar people (O’Dea 1957; Shipps 1985; 2001, [1994]; Bloom 2006 [1992]; Ostling & Ostling 2007; Marks &

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<sup>112</sup> Personal interview conducted March 29, 2013.

Beal 2008; Mauss 1994, 2008).<sup>113</sup> As mentioned in a footnote in chapter one, Mormons often cite 1 Peter 2:9 which reads: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” as the source for their title as a peculiar people. Yet, they are not the only group to adopt that title, many other Christian groups have also read that scripture and seen themselves as “a holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9).

One reason the peculiarity of the Mormons interested O’Dea was their ability to remain so over time. But what makes Mormons so “peculiar”? Below I will explore the historical roots of four themes that emerge when scholars consider questions of Mormon identity: A peculiar people; Mormonism as an ethnic sub-culture; lived religions and adhering to a specific code of conduct (such as the Word of Wisdom); and polygamy.<sup>114</sup> I then turn to discuss gender.

### **A Peculiar People**

Mormon identity, like any religious identity, can be said to be a set of dispositions passed on through generations which signals a specific way of being in, and relating to the world (Mauss 2008:292; Yorgason 2003:19; Shepherd & Shepherd 2001:177). Cultural and historical context also influence ways of being. In speaking of Mormonism as a product of a specific time in history, O’Dea noted that “it developed and grew in the context of its own self-consciousness, its strong group loyalty reinforced by its belief in its own peculiarity and its special covenant” (1957:119). Although O’Dea was writing over 50 years ago, I find this is still true.

In my visits to a New Jersey ward during February of 2011, I heard Mormons use the phrases “peculiar people” and “special covenant” repeatedly in reference to themselves and other Mormons. For those converting to Mormonism taking on this new religion is more involved than

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<sup>113</sup> A quick search on the official LDS website reveals that this term “peculiar” has been used to describe Mormons over 400 times in venues such as General Conference talks given by Church authorities, articles written in Church publications and in Church manuals (<http://lds.org/search?lang=eng&query=peculiar> accessed May 18, 2011).

<sup>114</sup> A copy of the Word of Wisdom is provided as Appendix F.

merely exchanging one religion for another, it also means adopting a new cultural tradition or group identity (Embry 1994:121). Part of adopting a new tradition is participating in the group's collective (group) memory. A collective memory not only contributes to the formation of individuals and their community, it helps retain that constructed identity (Hervieu-Léger 2000:165; Yorgason 2003:25, 173; Bellah et al. 2008 [1985]:152).

Historian Davis Bitton stated that a sense of a group's consciousness is formed by remembering its history. This is certainly the case in Mormonism, where parades and celebrations focus on a Pioneer heritage of the early Mormon migration to Utah. These types of celebrations are important tools in constructing a group history and identity, as well as a group memory (Bitton, 1994:175-76). The collective memory is an important foundation for identity, but it is only when the official celebrations are internalized on a smaller more personal scale that they become part of a groups' self-consciousness. Let me illustrate this point by using the example of family reunions as a way of establishing a group's history.

Events such as family reunions help solidify the past and bring it forward into our present. When families assemble together in events such as reunions, individual members are integrated into a consecrated whole (Bourdieu, 1996:22). The work of integration falls mostly to women as they are the ones who are responsible for maintaining relationships, and therefore often the ones that organize such events. Part of relationship maintenance then is sharing a memorialized past as a group which forms a collective memory.

Historian Ethan Yorgason (2003) discussed the ways in which the metaphor of "home," along with a regional presence, is used in forming a collective memory. With all of the persecution early Mormons experienced, a solid "home" was originally elusive even though that was Smith's original plan. Yet, as the Mormons moved west they were still able to establish and

retain a sense of inhabiting a regional home both in the idea of Zion and in their new home in Utah. This new home was celebrated by establishing Pioneer Day festivities marking the July 24, 1847, arrival into Utah. The first recorded Days of '47 parade was held in Salt Lake City on July 24, 1849, and continues today.

Pioneer Day celebrates not only a new home, but triumph in the face of adversity. The Mormons exodus, or “trek,” west occupies a large place in the Mormon collective memory. Pioneer stories of sacrifice and heroism persist in Church teachings (May 2001:50) and have made their way into Utah state civic life. In Utah, Pioneer Day (July 24<sup>th</sup>) is a public holiday and is celebrated with just as much gusto as the Fourth of July with parades, fireworks, rodeos, and picnics. Many companies give this day off as a paid holiday instead of Good Friday. Both inside and outside of Utah, Mormon congregations celebrate this holiday with special pioneer-themed events such as recreating the pioneer’s trek west complete with handcarts and period costumes. Pioneer stories contain elements of martyrdom and redemption—the idea that the early Mormon never would have made it to Utah if God had not been with them. Pioneer Day can be considered part of a Mormon collective memory due to the fact that celebrations are regularly held in countries as diverse as Germany and Africa (Cannon 2006:81). While I was in Australia the Sunday school lesson centered on Utah Pioneers. Displayed on easels on the small desk at the front of the class were paintings of pioneers crossing the plains and photos of the Salt Lake City temple. The teacher talked of faith and courage and emphasized that all Mormons are pioneers in some sense.

Religious communities that retell stories of a collective history not only keep the past alive, but also offer examples of an embodied meaning of community (Bellah et al. 2008 [1985]:153). Retelling the Pioneer story enables converts, even those born and living outside of

the United States, to adopt a unique religious history and identity. For example, Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf, a high Church official, remarked that he “adopted” nineteenth-century Mormon pioneers” as his “spiritual ancestors” (Cannon 2006:81). This thought of being adopted by spiritual ancestors indicates one of the ways that family can be a flexible idea within Mormonism.

Historian O’D noted that in the course of developing a unique religious identity, Mormonism also established an equally peculiar American subculture that has survived despite fierce opposition and tremendous obstacles (1957:258). I presented some of the historical accounts of fierce opposition earlier in this chapter. From those events we can infer how a collective memory of past persecution remains part of the Mormon identity. Some would say that this identity extends beyond the collective and becomes an ethnic sub-culture.

### **Mormonism as an Ethnic Sub-Culture**

O’Dea labeled the Mormon subculture as a “near-nation” noting that through their common experience of migrating west, Mormons had established a common homeland, culture, religion and tradition that are the stuff from which nationality is born (1957:116; Mauss, 2008). O’Dea also sees however, that Mormonism’s peculiarity presents a paradox; it has typical American qualities that were born and developed here in America, being almost “an America in miniature” (1957:117), yet it has come closer than any other group to establishing a separate ethnic identity apart from Americanism through its peculiar identity and group self-consciousness.

Jan Shipps argued that “although the political, economic, and social independence of the Mormon kingdom came to an end in the late 1890s, topography combined with time and distance to allow the growth of a Mormon culture that encompassed a true diversity of persons, fusing

them into an ethnic group” (2001 [1994]:72). Similarly, historians Armand Mauss and Martin Marty argue that pride in specific and unique ethnic identities, including religious identity, is part of what it means to be American (1994:62, Marty 1999:17). Mauss noted that this pride in ethnic identity, along with an increase in Mormon scholarship, and the inclusion of Mormons in the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, helped legitimize a peculiar ethnic identity (1994:63). Often this ethnic identity is associated with or even conflated with Utah.

Mormonism is often perceived as a regional culture due to the high concentration of Mormons in Utah. O’Dea noted that a distinct Mormon community evolved out of the early Mormon settlers separating themselves from non-Mormons or “gentiles.” The very act of separation increased the distinctive nature of the Mormons as well as increased development of separateness (1957:113; May 2001:72). While some Mormons have lived outside of Utah from the Church’s early history, Utah has been the center for Mormonism in many ways. In 1920, 70% of all Mormons lived in Utah (Allen & Leonard 1992 [1976]:498). By 1980 Mormons were more widely dispersed, but the majority still lived Utah and the surrounding western region of Idaho, and parts of Wyoming, Arizona and California (Wuthnow 1988:85). In 2009 Pew Research Center report “A Portrait of Mormons in the U.S.,” it was reported that Mormons make up 58% of Utah’s population, and 1.7% of the American adult population (Pond 2009).<sup>115</sup> Thus, to truly understand life in Utah and the western region, one must understand Mormonism itself and the ways in which its history is a critical component of the social order and life in the intermountain West (Neusner & Green 1999:76).

In this regional western setting, the Church is more tightly organized and Mormons think of themselves as a group or a “people” who are different from their non-Mormon neighbors, and

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<sup>115</sup> According to the 2012 Pew report on the global religious landscape, Utah is the only state that has this high of a majority of one religious denomination (2012b). Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Arkansas all have around 53% of the population identifying as evangelical protestant. See <http://religions.pewforum.org/maps> for more information.



as a whole, the Church clings to its peculiar identity (Bennett 1958:143). Stark sees that Mormonism, while indeed having a distinct identity, is not so easily defined as an ethnic sub-culture. Quoting historian Sydney Ahlstrom, Stark argued that although scholars cannot be certain if Mormonism is “a sect, a mystery cult, a new religion, a church, a people, a nation, or an American subculture” (2005:5), one can be certain that it is something new, and it may, in fact, be all of those things. As a rapidly growing global religion, Stark may have been more comfortable labeling Mormonism as a religious movement with global networks of faith.

Some may argue that American Evangelicals may also fit in the category of a group with a unique identity bordering on sub-culture. Indeed many are considered to be genuinely counterculture as they often distance themselves from modern society in some way (Smith, 1998). I agree that evangelicals and Mormons share many traits, including both being American religions with unique identities. Given the history of Mormonism, and their deep connection to Utah, I would not go so far as to say that evangelicals share the same type of ethnic identity. Exploring that issue fully is a topic beyond the scope of this project.

### **Lived Religion: Specific Codes of Conduct**

Along with constructing a unique or peculiar religious identity that can sometimes be seen as an ethnic sub-culture, there are other tools such as codes of conduct that groups use to erect and maintain social and religious boundaries. Institutionalized patterns of behavior are also commitment mechanisms that reinforce identity and promote cohesive communities (Kanter, 1972). As this work will show, an ethic of care is an important code of conduct for Mormons, although they themselves point to adherence to the Word of Wisdom as the most important one

to follow.<sup>116</sup> The Word of Wisdom is a dietary code of health similar to that of Jews, or Muslims. It is published in the Doctrine and Covenants section 89 as a revelation from God given to Joseph Smith and is therefore considered scripture.<sup>117</sup> Adhering to this Mormon doctrine plays a crucial role in developing a distinctive identity that allows adherents to set themselves apart from others as a “peculiar people” (Shipps 2001 [1994]:69; Marks & Beal 2008). I present this discussion to illuminate the ways that Mormons adopt codes of conduct as part of their lived religion.

Mormon historian Terryl L. Givens explains that the Word of Wisdom forbids the ingestion of certain substances, most notably tobacco, alcohol, and “hot drinks,” which is interpreted to mean coffee and tea (2004:122).<sup>118</sup> For orthodox Mormons this also means any caffeinated drink such as Coke® or Pepsi® as they can be addictive in the same way that coffee is.<sup>119</sup> Although Joseph Smith taught adherence to this dietary code as early as 1833, strict adherence was not a requirement for admission into the LDS temples until the 1920s, which Givens observes coincides with the advent of the prohibition movement in America (2004:122-23). Today it is still the case that converts wanting to be baptized or members wanting to receive a temple recommend (required for admittance into any LDS temple) must adhere to this code of conduct.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, observing the Word of Wisdom is necessary in order to be eligible for

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<sup>116</sup> Mormons refer to such compliance as “observing” the Word of Wisdom. Such observance is one part of what establishes a Mormon as a “member in good standing” (see glossary for further information). The Word of Wisdom is a common topic of sermons, all Church classes (i.e. Sunday school classes, primary, etc.), and missionary discussions given to potential converts. In Utah it is also a topic of general casual conversation and even matters of law, especially regarding the sale of alcohol.

<sup>117</sup> See appendix F for the full text from the Doctrine and Covenants section 89.

<sup>118</sup> Givens is a historian who focuses on Mormonism and is himself a Mormon.

<sup>119</sup> I use the word orthodox here to acknowledge the fact that not all Mormons strictly follow all of the LDS doctrinal teachings, including following the word of wisdom, temple marriage, and paying a full 10% tithing. Like any other religious tradition, individual practices within the tradition may vary. However, strictly speaking, according to official Church teachings, there is only one proper way to follow the doctrine, which is what I refer to as “orthodox.”

<sup>120</sup> Converts must wait one year before being eligible for a temple recommend.

hire with the LDS Church administrative offices or its affiliates including BYU, to serve an LDS mission, or to hold certain Church positions.

Converts often see adhering to the Word of Wisdom as an important part of adopting a new Mormon identity. This is done on a global basis. In response to the question of what the biggest difference being a baptized member of the LDS Church is, an African convert responded: “we used to attend parties and drink alcohol, that sort of thing, but now I don’t take in alcohol and I don’t take in tea and coffee.”<sup>121</sup> In one of my interviews, when I asked what the biggest difference between Mormons and others was, the man joked, “less coffee!”<sup>122</sup>

Some see that modern adherence to the Word of Wisdom is an identity marker of Mormonism much the same way practicing polygamy was to those in the nineteenth century. Although polygamy was not widely practiced, outsiders often equated plural marriage with Mormonism. While that juxtaposition was most likely more common in the nineteenth century, I still find that many people associate Mormons with polygamy. However, people who are more familiar with the LDS practices of avoiding tobacco and alcohol see that as an identity marker.

For some Mormons, adherence to the Word of Wisdom is occasion for social labeling, and it can generate awkwardness at typical American gatherings important for social interaction such as cocktail parties, and coffee breaks (May, 2001:72). Others see adherence to the Word of Wisdom as a point of pride in a unique identity, even in non-religious situations. An example of this is noted by professor of American Religious History, Dr. Arthur Remillard, who cited a 1910 newspaper article covering a basketball tournament which a Mormon team won with only five players. Most teams have ten to fifteen players; having only five players meant that there were no extra players to substitute with, and those five boys had to play the entire game, which is very

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<sup>121</sup> Personal interview conducted March 30, 2013.

<sup>122</sup> Personal interview conducted July 26, 2012.

strenuous. The newspaper article attributes the win to the exercise the Mormon boys obtained on the farm, but Mormon parents attributed the win to “clean living” and adherence to the Word of Wisdom (Remillard, 2006:217).

A more recent example of the benefits of “clean living” can be found in “success stories” of dramatic weight loss. In a July, 2011 article for “Church News and Events,” a feature of the LDS.org website, Denise Hill tells how applying principles from the Word of Wisdom helped her lose 150 pounds in one year (Niebergall, 2011). Hill stated that she tried many other diet plans and none worked. But, when she began following the guidelines of the Word of Wisdom, which includes eating more fruit and vegetables, eating meat only sparingly, and exercising and praying daily, she was at last able to shed the excess weight. She is quoted as saying that initially she was not certain how such an old principles can be applied in today’s world but, “now she can see the full blessings of following the Word of Wisdom in everyday life” (Niebergall, 2011).

Sociologist Laurence Iannaccone argued a different point on the issue of adhering to strict codes of conduct. Rather than focusing on strict adherence as an identity marker, Iannaccone argued that churches with strict codes are stronger because less committed members are screened out, stimulating higher participation rates among remaining adhering members (Iannaccone 1994:1180). Sociologist Rodney Stark also sees strictness, including adherence to specific codes of conduct, differently. He sees strictness as a way religious movements maintain sufficient tension with their environment. Such tension, Stark notes, is necessary for these religious movements such as Mormonism to grow (Stark 2001a:237). Harvard business school professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter would agree. She labeled such codes of conduct as commitment-building mechanisms and feels that communities that had such mechanisms were more likely to be successful than those that did not (1972). Mormonism’s dietary code is an

example of what Kanter presents as a sacrificial mechanism, a mechanism which involves members surrendering something in exchange for membership.

Finally, in looking at any form of religious conduct, sociologist Meredith McGuire challenges scholars of religion to reexamine their assumptions about people's religious practices. She reminds scholars that such practices, and the stories that they use to make sense of their lives, are always changing. McGuire noted that only a small proportion of people achieve tight consistency in their beliefs, practices, and actions (2008:5-16). It is true that not all Mormons adhere to the Word of Wisdom. I've seen plenty of Mormons in coffee shops, and there are lots of jokes about Utah Mormons pretending not to recognize each other within the confines of Utah's State Liquor stores. I agree with McGuire's comment that practices are always changing; it is certainly the case that ideas and practices do change within Mormonism. Take for instance the grey area of drinking coke or other soda products containing caffeine. As mentioned above, orthodox Mormons often considered drinking any beverage containing caffeine sinful. This is apparently made clear by the fact that no caffeinated drinks are sold on BYU's campus.<sup>123</sup> But, people began to point out that the Word of Wisdom specifically states "hot beverages" which was interpreted to mean coffee and tea, which left drinking other caffeinated beverages up to the individual, and most found that it was okay. Even official church groups started relaxing a bit. I must say the first time I attended an LDS function and Coke® was served I was a bit shocked—pleased, but shocked because I assumed all Mormons shunned the use of caffeine in any form.

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<sup>123</sup> Due to its strict codes of conduct, known as the "honor code" which prohibits consumption of drugs and alcohol, prohibits pre-marital sex, and has very strict dress codes, BYU is always ranked at the top of the "Stone-Cold Sober Schools" lists put out by Huffington Post. I talked to one woman in New Jersey who grew up Catholic but was sent to BYU because of its honor code. Her father felt that she would do more studying than partying at BYU, and that it was a safe place for her to be. She actually ended up converting to Mormonism at BYU and married a fellow student.

On September 5, 2012, the LDS church posted a clarifying statement on LDS.org that stated “the church does not prohibit the use of caffeine,” but then softened it a bit to state, “the church revelation spelling out health practices... does not mention the use of caffeine” (Stack, 2012c). Regardless, BYU is very conservative and still does not serve any drinks containing caffeine on campus. There was a “BYU for caffeine” student protest in September 2012 with a corresponding Facebook page, but nothing came of it and the Facebook page has since been taken down. In October, 2013 a “mistake” resulted in Coke Zero© being sold out of a vending machine on BYU’s campus (Stack, 2013c). Despite BYU officials continuing to claim lack of demand for caffeinated drinks on campus, once Coke Zero was spotted in the vending machine there was an immediate run on sales.

Returning to McGuire’s comment, I would not fully agree with her statement that only a small portion of people achieve tight consistency in their practices. I would suggest that Mormons may be one group in which a number of people within the group adhere to religious practices with tight consistency. The group which adheres to the practice with consistency are those who hold temple recommends. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, adherence to the Word of Wisdom is necessary in order to gain admittance to LDS temples. Since temple recommend interviews happen every two years, a level of both consistency and adherence is indicated.

### **Polygamy**

Despite the facts that the practice of polygamy was short lived and never practiced by all Mormons, it continues to be a literary focus of writings on Mormon family life and Mormon identity (Bowman, 2012; Shipps, 2001 [1994]). It is not uncommon for people to confuse the splinter group the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS), which

still practices polygamy in small insular villages in Southern Utah and Northern Arizona, with The LDS Church. Naturally some of the confusion stems from the similarity in names.

Additionally, some of the confusion may stem from the fact that the FLDS group considers themselves “Mormon” and shares early roots and history with the LDS Church. The FLDS church broke away from the LDS Church when polygamy was abandoned by the LDS Church in 1896. Although polygamy is no longer a part of current Mormon identity, it is important in the ways it shaped Mormon thought about family.

Polygamy in the LDS Church was practiced between the years of 1852 and 1896. Joseph Smith had declared plural marriage to be sanctioned of God in order to help build the new Israel (and the kingdom of God). Historian Matthew Bowman stated that “by the time the last Mormon wagons left Nauvoo in the fall of 1846, thousands had passed through the endowment (including the temple wedding ceremony) and 153 men had entered into plural marriage with 587 women” (2012:124).<sup>124</sup> Writing in 1957, Thomas O’Dea stated that the Church estimated that only 10-15 percent of early Mormons practiced polygamy, but that “non-Mormons visiting Utah often put the figure as high as 50 percent” (1957:246).

Currently, while it is not a church sanctioned practice, polygamy is still practiced by some Mormons. Most of those still practicing polygamy are either unofficial splinter groups in parts of Utah, Arizona, Nevada, Idaho, and Montana.<sup>125</sup> There are also those Mormons who claim to be remaining true to the beginnings of the faith, or those who belong to the FLDS group which is run by Warren Jeffs.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Endowment is a temple ordinance/ritual that includes teachings about the purpose of life and includes participants making promises or covenants with God. See glossary for a full definition.

<sup>125</sup> Many people living in these states know of these types of underground LDS groups. I have personal experience with them as very distant relatives.

<sup>126</sup> Perhaps the one exception of mainstream Mormons still practicing polygamy today are some of the Mormons in Ghana where polygamous arrangements are part of the culture as well as their LDS history.

Inherent in the idea of polygamy is that ‘family’ extends beyond one man/husband and one woman/wife; such forms of family include multiple spouses and often many children who do not all share the same two birth parents. In other words, although not practiced, there is, within Mormonism itself, more flexible notions of family and kinship than in most of Christianity. This extended concept of family is a remarkable element of polygamy within Mormonism that is often overlooked. I argue that if Mormons’ ideas of family were not elastic and capacious, LDS congregations would not become *ward families*. While there are several ways Mormons develop the ability to consider a larger view of family that extends beyond the narrow nuclear family model, their history is an example of how Mormonism itself contains flexible notions of family and kinship.

One last aspect of Mormon identity that makes Mormons a “peculiar people” is the Church’s bureaucratic structure and use of lay leaders rather than professionally trained clergy. One of the problems with the Church’s leadership system is a deep gender bias. Before discussing the Mormons bureaucratic structures, it helps to have an understanding of gender roles within the Church and the ways that women are excluded in leadership positions.

### **Gender Roles**

Gender roles are inherently part of LDS Church doctrine and culture and greatly influence all levels of the Church including structures of power, as well as ideas about family. This is not unique to Mormonism. Like many other Christian traditions, gender roles are reflected in authority figures—for instance priest and God as father. Mormons seem to take this a bit more personally; the prescribed family structure is an innately authoritarian, hierarchical enterprise embedded with systems of power, and reflects the larger structures. The father is head and provides leadership while mother plays a supporting role. These roles are codified through



the LDS Church's *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* which is perhaps the most public and explicit indication that the LDS church specifically relates gender roles, strong family values, and a particular model of family, with strong society (CJCLDS, 1995). Specifically the proclamation states that "gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose." It defines the roles according to gender by stating that "by divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children" (CJCLDS, 1995). It is obvious that in this document, gender is seen as something innate rather than the social construction it is. Further, gender is destiny and the deciding, and limiting factor, in familial roles. This is a very complex issue and one that I will focus on much more intently in chapters five and six. For now, let me turn to gender as a general topic as it relates to Mormon bureaucratic structures.

The clearly defined gender roles that Mormonism stresses creates a lot of tension that most Mormons prefer to ignore. Even though the majority of Mormons are women (56%, Pew Reports, 2009), men are the only ones allowed to hold the priesthood and top leadership positions. Currently the system is designed so that top leadership positions are also priesthood positions—meaning that one must hold the priesthood in order to hold the position, and therefore are male.

Many Mormon women like to point out that women do hold top leadership positions on both ward and general church levels. For instance women hold positions such as Relief Society President, Primary President, and Young Women's President. A middle-aged man I interviewed told me that the men in the ward are divided into two groups (Elders Quorum, and High Priests) but that the women are not divided into groups, there is only one group for women. This means

that there are two leaders (one for each men's group) for the men in the ward and only one leader for the women. With only one leader looking after all the women, the Relief Society President is responsible for overseeing all the women in the ward. The man I was interviewing said that "this means that the only other person in the ward that has that much responsibility is the bishop who looks after the entire ward."<sup>127</sup>

While it is true that these are indeed leadership positions, they are positions that lead women and children exclusively. According to Church handbooks, they are also positions that "operate under the direction of priesthood leaders" (CJCLDS, 2010:64). Specifically, "the bishop and his counselors provide priesthood leadership for the Relief Society," and "the bishop meets with the Relief Society president regularly to discuss Relief Society and welfare matters" (CJCLDS, 2010:65). As I talked to bishops, Relief Society presidents, and members, I discovered there is a wide range of ways the Church policies are interpreted. Since the instruction handbook is rather vague, it is left up to the individual bishop to decide what "providing leadership" and "meeting regularly with the Relief Society president to *discuss* matters" means. One Relief Society president told me that in a previous ward she had to get permission from her bishop for absolutely everything the Relief Society did; she had no control over any part of the group's finances and was not involved in the decision-making process. Another Relief Society president told me that a previous bishop gave her total control over all finances and decisions and only wanted to be kept abreast of major happenings rather than intimately involved. So, even though the Relief Society president is often seen as the female equivalent to the male bishop, their roles are entirely different and the power structure is still male dominated.

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<sup>127</sup> Personal interview conducted March 29, 2013.

Mormon bureaucratic structures are deeply tied to Mormon identity. A large part of Mormon identity is derived from strict gender roles which designate a clear division of labor within Church governance. The fact that all Church programs fall under the jurisdiction of a priesthood holder (such as bishop on the local level) means that women who are excluded from holding the priesthood are also excluded from the highest positions of power. This inequality in power is a topic that is gaining momentum in the form of the Ordain Women movement. I say “gaining momentum” because I speculate that it has always been a topic of internal discussion but one that has been more open since Maxine Hanks (1992b) published her edited work “Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism” in 1992.<sup>128</sup> The new momentum was the official launch of “Ordain Women” on April 5, 2013 in Salt Lake City Utah. Although the topic women’s ordination (and the event) did not come up in my interviews, discussing it in this dissertation aids in understanding some of the peculiarities of Mormonism including Mormon identity and bureaucratic structures. Since the exclusion of women from the priesthood, and therefore the highest positions of power, is an important element in Church polity, I will return to the topic of women’s ordination following a discussion on Mormon bureaucratic structures.

### Mormon Bureaucratic Structures

Mormon identity is deeply tied to its bureaucratic structures which are important for Mormons in ways that go beyond the obvious role of managing a worldwide religion; it is framed by the interaction of family life and the Church’s bureaucratic structures (Davies, 2000:200). Church organization is comprised of unpaid clergy and lay leadership. This element of a lay leadership further enforces Mormons as a peculiar people because “every Mormon is the preacher, teacher,

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<sup>128</sup> See chapter one, page 4.

exegete, and definer of meaning before an audience of peers, who at a moment or a month later may switch positions with him” (Leone, 1979:168).

Positions in the Church are filled by members who are “called” into that station. Along with the obvious role of callings which is facilitating Church function, by encouraging active involvement callings also aid in retention of both new and longtime members. Serving in a called position often requires adhering to Mormon codes of conduct, therefore, callings also promote a lived expression of LDS values (Marks & Beal, 2008:273). Every local level Church position from bishops, stake leaders (who oversee larger areas and to whom the bishops report), to nursery leaders all of whom are unpaid volunteers.<sup>129</sup> Positions that are Church-wide and considered full-time callings, such as General Authority positions (including the Church president, see glossary), are paid from Church funds (Givens, 2004:319). None of the LDS clergy, including the Church President, receive formal seminary training. While the Church does have a “seminary” program, it is not a standard seminary aimed at training clergy, but an academic program for youth (male and female) between the ages of fourteen to eighteen.<sup>130</sup> Attending seminary adds another layer of commitment onto regular church attendance and fulfilling Church callings. Sociologists such as Gordon and Gary Shepherd see that these types of commitment prepare young Mormons for lay religious careers and missionary work (2001 [1994]). Of course seminary attendance also aids in forming worldviews. Mormon worldviews, like any other religious traditions, are shaped by church principles, beliefs, sacred texts, traditions, etc.

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<sup>129</sup> A bishop is the local leader of a ward who provides general leadership and management for the ward but does not preach. This is a priesthood position so only men are called to be bishops. See glossary for more information. Nurseries are a type of babysitting /toddler care service provided during Sunday school and Relief Society or Priesthood meetings for children between the ages of eighteen months to three years. Both men and women fill positions in the nursery.

<sup>130</sup> See the glossary entry “seminary” for more information.

Most Christian congregations are shaped in part by their pastor, priest, or ministers; Mormons are not. In LDS services (referred to as Sacrament meeting) there is not a priest to give a weekly sermon; rather, congregants are asked to give talks (sermons) on selected topics. Speakers are given suggestions and guidelines, but the actual text of the speaker's remarks is entirely up to the individual. Talks are not inspected by the bishop for accuracy or appropriateness before they are delivered from the pulpit to the congregation.<sup>131</sup> The bishop's main function in the Sacrament is to conduct the meeting (greet and welcome congregants, make announcements, ensure that the meeting begins and ends on time). Although the bishop does not approve the sermons given by the congregant, he does have the responsibility to offer clarifications and corrections to a speaker's remarks "being careful not to cause embarrassment" (CJCLDS, 2006:64) to the speaker.<sup>132</sup> Not having a preacher deliver a sermon leaves the interpretation of doctrine up to the individual which may add to the confusion between doctrine and culture. For instance, a non-member may attend an LDS meeting and assume that what is spoken from the pulpit is doctrine rather than personal interpretation. In LDS sacrament meetings, a large majority of remarks offered are personal interpretations rather than Church-sanctioned doctrine. That is not to say that the remarks do not align with Church doctrine; it is just to caution the listener that everything they may hear in any LDS meeting (including General Conference) is entirely the speaker's personal reflections.

Through the execution of callings and lay-leadership, Mormons both shape and are shaped by the bureaucratic structures that govern their religious practices. Due to the high level of commitment and time required in Mormon bureaucratic structures (lay leadership positions),

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<sup>131</sup> As already mentioned, the role of a bishop is more of an overseer and spiritual counselor rather than teacher or preacher.

<sup>132</sup> In the four years that I have been attending LDS services, I have only seen the bishop interrupt a speaker once and that was only to stop the speaker from lighting a candle, not to correct any doctrinal elements of the sermon.

religious structures also quickly become social structures. In other words, because Mormons spend such a great deal of time attending Church services and functions, and executing Church callings, their religious world becomes their social world, the place for them to develop friendships and socialize with others and as such, shapes their identities. Further solidifying the social aspect is the fact that wards are actually akin to villages—groups of neighbors living and worshipping together as well as serving each other through ward callings.

As Mormons simultaneously produce and consume their religious resources, we can say that they are both the object and the subject of their religious and social ontology. The bureaucratic structure of callings aids in the construction of social and religious spheres. Religious resources (such as callings) reinforce themselves through meeting needs (callings serve organizational needs in the ward) and reinforcing needs (callings are the tool used to serve ward needs). In this sense then, callings are structuring structures that help form Mormon habits and dispositions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Sociologist Max Weber is well known for his discussions of patriarchy within familial structures and how power is obtained. He emphasized the differences between charisma and patriarchal structures and detailed how lines of priestly authority mirror father as priest (1964 [1922]:15) and establish lines of legitimate authority and hierarchy (ibid:47). Weber also referenced Puritanism's edicts to work hard in one's calling, to live a chaste and simple life, and to believe that labor is considered to be ordained of God. He emphasized the connection between grace and labor and states that the command to work was interpreted as unconditional and applied to everyone (Weber 2003 [1958]:159). This is all very much in line with Mormon thought and practice.

Lowell Bennion was a Mormon who saw many connections between Weber's thoughts and Mormonism. Bennion's 1933 University of Strasburg dissertation *Max Weber's Methodology* was the first book-length treatment of Weber's work in English and the first to explore the relationship between Mormonism and Weber's ideas. Bennion argued that Weber's work actually emphasized an understanding of the actions of individuals within the contexts of organizations and society, and states that social relations of family, state, church, and corporation all have the same type of social relation foundation.

One of Bennion's goals was to show how Weber's types of social relations are echoed in the hierarchical dynamics of the LDS Church (1933:156; DiPadova, 1997:12). Weber found that priests lay claim to power and authority by virtue in a sacred tradition while a prophet's claim is based on personal revelation and charisma (1964 [1922]:46). Smith first represents himself as a boy prophet (Bennion, 1933:129). By claiming access to God as a prophet, Smith then established himself as an authority on salvation and situated himself as the first priest in the bureaucratic priesthood structure he would establish (DePills, 1966:73). Bennion's work illustrated how this power (of priest and prophet) was part of the interplay between religious and economic forces that fueled Mormonism's success as they moved west into Utah. Mormons have been exhorted to industry, and works as an important salvific tool, from the very beginning of their religious history (Bennion, 1933:131-32). Persecution and a struggle to build a new home in the west reinforced both group identity and religious conviction. As the early Mormons worked as a collective, giving everything to the Church so all could survive, solidarity in social and economic life was reinforced (ibid:134). As the Church grew and began to thrive, Church polity had to grow as well. With Smith at the head of the Church as priest and prophet, the entire government of the Church came to rest on the priesthood (DePills, 1966:181). One way of

understanding the role of priesthood in Church governance is to consider the demographics of Mormon bureaucracy.

### **The Demographics of Mormon Bureaucracy**

Mormons are still a rather insular group whose strict gender roles limit access to power. In this section I will consider the racial demographics of the LDS Church's general authorities and how appointing mostly white North American men as leaders makes the Church appear to be an American Church although it is a global church. I will then discuss how the power structures in the Church are highly gendered and how some women are beginning to press for radical change.

Mormon bureaucracy is often referred to as a democratic form of structure, despite its divisive elements. Historian Richard Bushman noted that "in a democratic time, the Mormons emerged as the most democratic of churches, rivaled only by the Quakers. Yet at the same time, the seeds of hierarchy were sown early" (2005:153). These seeds of hierarchy could be the fact that many in LDS leadership have deep family roots within the religion.

In his 1997 book *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, historian Michael Quinn wrote about the kinship connections to LDS church hierarchy. Here Quinn stated that as much as forty percent of those appointed to the church's leadership in its first century were closely related by kinship (1997:173). Considering that the early Mormons were a relatively small group who fled into Mexican territory outside of the United States to escape persecution--and the added element of polygamy which only increased the kinship ties, this really should be no surprise and, in fact, should be expected. In many ways this practice shaped the notion of Mormonism as a family led by patriarchs. While this was certainly the case in the early history of the Church,



Quinn speculates that it may still be a factor to some extent today, especially given the fact that Mormonism is still a relatively insular group.

Since its beginning, the Mormon bureaucratic structure has consisted almost entirely of white men. Of the current 107 General Authorities who manage Church affairs, 94 (roughly 88%) are white. Of that same 107, 70 are from the United States, 37 of whom are from Utah alone, five from Brazil, four from Mexico, two from Japan, two from Canada, two from Guatemala, two from Uruguay, two from the United Kingdom, and one each from Kenya, France, Australia, Samoa, Sweden, Portugal, Philippines, Peru, Spain, Chile, Argentina, Zimbabwe, Korea, New Zealand, Venezuela, South Africa, Germany, and the Czech Republic (CJCLDS, 2013g).

In the table below I present a look at the percent of General Authorities from a given region in relation to the percent of Mormons in that same region.

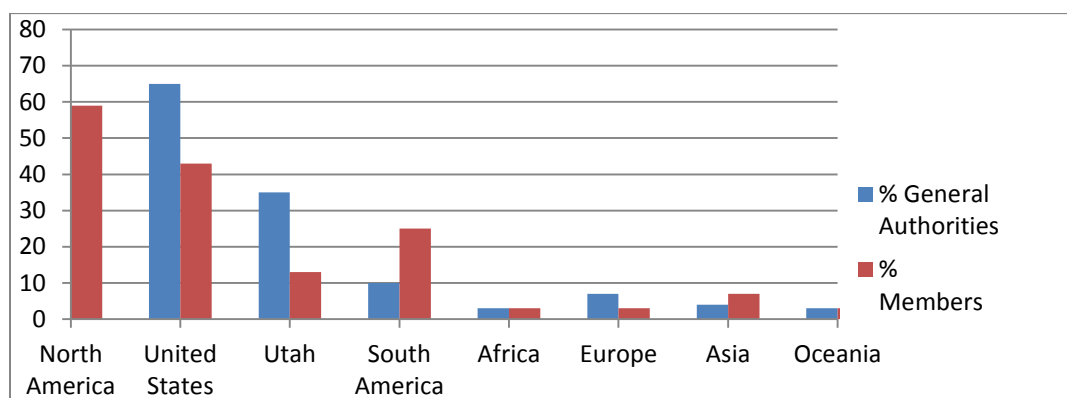


Table 3.1 (CJCLDS, 2013g).

There is an interesting discrepancy between General Authorities to membership ratios in Utah and South America. There is a great concentration of General Authorities from Utah even though Utah does not have a comparable percent of members, and the opposite is true in South America. Now if we look at percentages in reference to race, the picture becomes more skewed.

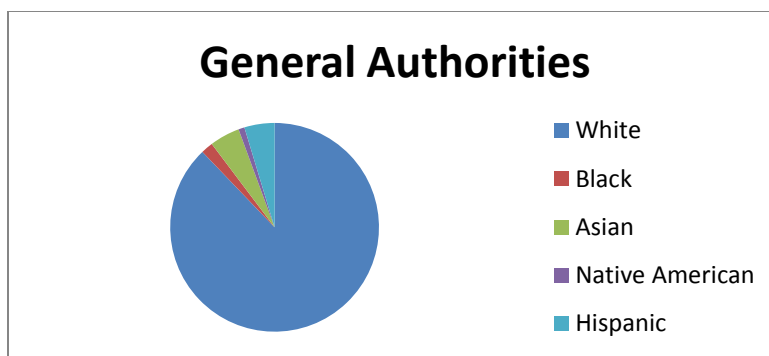


Table 3.2

Considering both graphs together, points to why the LDS Church is often seen as an American, or even a Utah church. Since the Church does not release detailed membership information, it is impossible to generate a chart that would compare the racial make-up of membership to the racial make-up of general authorities. Therefore, any attempt to generate such a comparison would be sheer speculation. However, since biographical information for each of the general authorities is provided on the LDS website (lds.org), it is possible to gather details about the race of Church leaders.

As mentioned in chapter two, nine in ten Mormons are white, non-Hispanic (Pew, 2009). And roughly nine in ten General Authorities are white—and all are men. In the past most General Authorities have been retirement aged while currently many are closer to middle-aged. Still, Church presidents tend to be older, bordering on elderly. Thomas S. Monson, the current LDS president is 86 years old. To date there have been sixteen Church presidents, and only the last three have been born after the turn of the last century.<sup>133</sup> Ten of the sixteen presidents had been alive during the years when Mormons practiced polygamy. I was unable to find any sociological studies on how the advanced age of Church leaders influences Church policy or membership, but one can speculate that their age lends them to be resistant to social change as

<sup>133</sup> Howard W. Hunter the 14<sup>th</sup> president was born in 1907.

their experience is often two generations behind the younger adults in the tradition. It is clear that the age and racial make-up of Church leaders is out of sync with their constituency.

Clearly, elements of age and race within LDS Church bureaucratic structures are an area in need of more sociological inquiry. One area that does have some available information worth considering is that of gender.

### *Mormon Feminists*

Mormon feminists are pushing for gender equality within their church.<sup>134</sup> This is not the first time LDS women have spoken out on this topic; the history of Mormon feminism is as long as that of the Church itself. Emma Smith, wife of founder Joseph Smith, voiced concern over financial matters of the church, and spoke out against issues of polygamy. Emma was the first president of the Relief Society, the LDS women's organization, and was ordained by her husband to preside over women in the Church.<sup>135</sup> The Relief Society was established in 1842, and for the next 88 years women in the LDS Church were ordained to the position of Relief Society president, and other callings within the temple. The practice of ordaining women ceased in the 1930s creating a binary between male priesthood holders and women (non-priesthood holders). The Church offers no explanation regarding the cessation of ordaining women therefore, many women (like those in the Ordain Women movement) see this practice as a cultural or procedural practice rather than a doctrinal edit. Currently, two separate LDS women's groups "Let Women Pray" and "Ordain Women" are once again raising awareness about the tightly rigid gender roles within the LDS church and are calling for change in practices regarding women.

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<sup>134</sup> These women do refer to themselves as Mormon feminists. The most obvious examples are blogs such as "Feminist Mormon Housewives," and "Young Mormon Feminists."

<sup>135</sup> See the introduction to *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* edited by Maxine Hanks, Signature Books, 1992, p. xiii.

**Let Women Pray** *began* as a Facebook event “wear pants to church day.” That event asked LDS women to wear pants to church rather than the culturally sanctioned dress or skirt in order to raise awareness around gender inequality. As I followed the Facebook page it appeared that very few women actually participated in the event by wearing pants to church on the designated day. There could be several reasons for the low participation rate. Maybe not very many women knew about it, or perhaps it was too public and women were apprehensive about drawing attention to themselves by wearing pants. I speculate that two biggest reasons were that the goal of the event was too vague, or, simply that many Mormons did not really care if women wore pants to Church. As I spent time with Mormons I noticed that in areas such as inner-city wards, wards with a lot of homeless people, or wards with a lot of visitors, seeing women in pants, even jeans, is not anything unusual. Regardless of why the event itself was a bit of a disappointment, it did provide a platform for the discussion of a bigger issue –the fact that a woman had never offered a prayer in any of the Church’s General Conference meetings.

General Conference is a biannual meeting held in Salt Lake City, Utah and attended by Mormons worldwide via internet, satellite, radio, or television. In the Church’s 183 year history, no woman has ever prayed in General Conference. In fact, it has only been in the last thirty years that women have been allowed to pray in their local Sacrament meetings. Even though there is no written prohibition for women offering prayers, meetings like General Conference and local sacrament were seen as meetings led by the priesthood and therefore only priesthood holders were allowed to participate. This left women feeling that their prayers were somehow not as valid as the prayers offered by men.

Amber Whiteley began the blog “Let Women Pray,” <http://letwomenpray.blogspot.com/>; as a letter writing campaign aimed at having a woman offer a prayer in the church’s April

General Conference. The group delivered 1,600 letters from men and women to the Church leaders. They felt that their prayers and letters were answered when on Saturday, April 6, 2013, Jean A. Stevens, made history as the first woman to pray in a General Conference meeting. Stevens, the first counselor in the Church's Primary presidency (an auxiliary children's program for children under the age of 12), offered the benediction to the first meeting held Saturday morning. The fact that the first prayer by a woman was delivered on the 183<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Church was particularly meaningful for many LDS women. Many reported that they shed tears of joy and gratitude that God does hear and answer prayers. Others were not aware that women had never prayed in General Conference before and were astonished to learn that this was an historic event.<sup>136</sup>

**Ordain Women** is a more focused group established to push the Church for the ordination of women. On March 17, 2013, the 171<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Relief Society (the LDS women's organization), Ordain Women launched their website, [ordainwomen.org](http://ordainwomen.org). This first step publically announced that there were active LDS women seeking equality through priesthood ordination. The ability to post a profile on the group's website made it possible for both men and women to see that they were not alone, that there were others that feel that the Church is inequitable in its treatment of women. It created a space to let people know that it is possible to be an active Mormon and also support a movement for equality within the Church.

The second bigger step followed on April 6, 2013 on the 183<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the founding of the LDS church when the movement hosted a public meeting they referred to as a launch event. The meeting was held in Salt Lake City, Utah at the same time the LDS men's

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<sup>136</sup> See "First prayer by woman offered at Mormon conference (video): Woman's public prayer makes church history" by Peggy Fletcher Stack in April 6, 2013 Salt Lake Tribune, <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/56116507-78/church-women-general-prayer.html.csp>.

priesthood meeting was being conducted across town as part of General Conference (the bi-annual Church convention). In Salt Lake, where the conference is held, local restaurants and shops offer “Ladies’ Night Out” specials geared toward LDS women so they can shop or dine while their husbands are in the priesthood meeting. The Ordain Women meeting was a radical alternative to those gendered options of shopping, but it holding it at the same time as the priesthood meeting was also a statement about the innately gendered nature of the priesthood meeting itself. Publically launching the movement this way was a bold step and required courage on the part of the women hosting and perhaps even attending the event.

The Ordain Women public meeting was bold and courageous for several reasons. First, the internet presence alone has stirred up quite a bit of cultural pushback. Organizers of the meeting admitted that they expected hecklers and at least some level of aggressive reaction. All were pleasantly surprised when those who have been quick to respond with comments telling the founders of Ordain Women that they were heretics and bound for hell failed to show up in person.

Second, and more serious, the event was bold due to possible official push back from the Church. Hecklers aside, the Church has a rather unfortunate history of reacting harshly to ideas its leaders feel threatens Church doctrine or authority. In an infamous event now referred to as the “September Six” (a term coined by the *Salt Lake Tribune*), six prominent members of the Mormon feminist and intellectual community received ecclesiastical discipline in the form of excommunication (one was actually disfellowshipped, which is a lesser punishment) for their critique of LDS doctrine and/or leadership.<sup>137</sup> Authors like Martha Pierce (1992) call such

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<sup>137</sup> This happened in 1993.

ecclesiastical discipline “authoritative shaming”--shaming men and women into silence.<sup>138</sup>

Shaming that resulted in great personal loss was effective, and people were indeed afraid to speak out. As a result, the common misnomer that Mormons follow their leaders blindly and without question gained a bit of credibility. In fact, one of the most common responses by opponents to the movement is that Mormon feminists are not following the prophet and are questioning Church authority. Therefore staging a public event launching a movement that could be seen as directly challenging Church doctrine and Church leaders did indeed require courage. The movement’s founder, Kate Kelly, a human rights attorney in Washington D.C., said she realizes the possible risks but is fully committed and not afraid to continue to speak out about issues of equality and push for the ordination of LDS women.

Kelly emphasized that the goal of the movement was not to abolish the idea that men and women are innately different, but to gain equality in the way these differences are valued. For instance, motherhood is always paired with priesthood (or priest) rather than fatherhood. This pairing makes priesthood a gendered term, and leaves fatherhood, priestess, and women who are not mothers unacknowledged and therefore under-valued. An equitable and appropriate pairing would be mother and father, and priest and priestess. Both pairings still contain gendered differences, but they are more inclusive (room for single women and women without children) and the differences are valued equally (Kelly, 2013).

On April 5, the day before the Ordain Women launch event, the general presidents of the LDS Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary organizations (the only Church leadership positions held by women on both local and Church-wide levels) taped a video conversation

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<sup>138</sup> See Pierce’s book section “Personal Discourse on God the Mother” in *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*, Signature Books, 1992.

centered on women and their role in the Church. These women talked about how they feel valued within the Church. One of their key points is that they feel respected in meetings where they are invited to sit with male leaders. In these meetings male leaders listen to them and are willing to either table decisions or consider a topic more carefully based on information the women present. The Relief Society president in particular found that to be an “ennobling experience” (Walker, 2013). These women held this up as proof that the male Church leaders are not alienated from Mormon women and that they are dedicated to serving all LDS members with God’s guidance. While many Mormon women agree, and find such counseling empowering, those behind the movement to ordain women feel that being asked for input in the decision making process is not the same as having the power to make decisions. In other words, being “ennobled” is not the same as being empowered.

Ennobling women rather than empowering women keeps women’s roles within the Church tied to a patriarchal system which is inherently one of inequality. Patriarchy is a social system constructed around specific kinds of social relationships (Johnson, 2000). In Mormonism these relationships are gendered and are based in ideas of familial identity where the fathers provide empowered leadership and mothers play supporting “ennobled” roles of nurturer and caretaker.

This small insight into the underlying issues of gender and how they relate to Mormon identity, Church governance, helps us get a larger picture of how doctrinally codified gender roles have a much wider reach than just domestic divisions of labor. As mentioned above, more work needs to be done on issues of race and age within Mormon bureaucratic structures, and overall, institutionalized racism (the long exclusion of blacks from the priesthood) is still an issue that some feel the LDS Church has not fully addressed. One white man in his mid-twenties



told me “the reality is, there was, and still is, racism in the Mormon Church. Other churches had racism too it just took the LDS church longer to admit that they were wrong. They still don’t admit it was racism, (excluding blacks from the priesthood), but it was. It was racism.”<sup>139</sup> I suspect that with the emergence of the Ordain Women movement, the Church will be forced to re-consider its codified elements of inequality. It may also urge the Church to consider how strict gender roles have familial undertones which may play a divisive role in their congregations (I discuss the negative aspects of a focus on family in chapter eight).

### Mormon Worship Services

The LDS church is structured to behave more like a very large church rather than relatively independent local congregations belonging to a common denomination. While some argue that LDS similitude this is no different from other religious traditions such as the Catholic church, I argue that the global Church-wide meetings such as General Conference, and smaller more local stake conferences, enable Mormons to think of themselves as belonging to more expansive group than their local congregation. The way congregations are assigned rather than chosen may also underscore the notion that Mormons belong to the religious tradition first, and the local congregation second. All of these factors aid in establishing an identity of belonging to a global Church.

Every LDS ward (or congregation) worldwide has the same programs, the same instructional manuals, and the same rotating structure of lay clergy. They even have the same furniture which has been bought from the Church supplier in Utah whether the ward building where the congregation meets is in Salt Lake or Santiago. This sameness is all part of the correlation movement. In 1972 the Correlation Department was founded to assure that this

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<sup>139</sup> Personal interview conducted February 3, 2012.

similitude was maintained throughout the global church. The Church's Publishing Services, and the Department of Internal Communications are responsible for writing and publishing all of the manuals for the Church worldwide (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:605).

Every program in every ward uses the same lesson manual and schedule. For example, regardless of which ward you decide to attend on any given Sunday the same Sunday school lesson will be taught from the same church issued manual in every class worldwide. Naturally languages will differ, but all of the teachers are strongly cautioned against providing their own interpretation of the text, and instead they are instructed to follow the lesson manual exactly. The only differing element is the talks given from the pulpit in Sacrament meeting. The only place and time when remarks from the pulpit are totally extemporaneous is during fast and testimony meetings (held the first Sunday of every month), in which members stand at the pulpit and give their testimonies (what Mormons refer to as bearing their testimonies). I have heard Mormons jokingly refer to this as "open mike night."<sup>140</sup> Yet, even these spontaneous meetings have a suggested structure and a standardized five point guideline that testimonies are encouraged to follow. For example, LDS children are taught how to "bear their testimony" with a teaching aid called "testimony gloves," which are designed to help children remember the five elements that a testimony should include: 1) knowledge that God is their Heavenly Father, 2) Jesus Christ is their Savior and Redeemer, 3) Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, 4) The Church of Jesus Christ is

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<sup>140</sup> It is very common to see the same people get up month after month and bear the same testimony, detail the same personal dramas, and in essence use the pulpit as their own personal soap box. I have personally seen that converts who were once clergy in other religious traditions gleefully use this open mike opportunity to deliver personal sermons. Also, the less than mentally stable use this opportunity as an excuse to air their grievances. In one ward one individual will get up every month and scold the congregants about making marks in the hymnals. The truly remarkable thing is that everyone who speaks is given the same respectful response from the congregants. No one heckles them, no one gets up and walks out, and due to the fact that these individuals repeat their performance on a monthly basis, one can assume that no one is telling them they should cease speaking during these testimony meetings. That is not to say that congregants suddenly become very interested in studying their hymnals, or realize they need to check and send text messages. It is to say, however, that in the wards that I have observed, there is a radical level of acceptance and care in the fact that everyone has the same opportunity to speak and be heard.

the Lord's church on earth today, and 5) that the church is led by a living prophet (Rappleye, 2011).

### **Sunday Services**

Standard Sunday worship services are a three-hour block of meetings held in buildings known as ward houses. It is common for at least three congregations to meet in one ward house; meeting times are staggered to accommodate the different wards. Many outsiders are confused about the place of the temple in Mormon worship and mistakenly believe that Mormons meet in their temples for weekly worship services. As I will discuss in chapter four, temples are reserved for special rituals only and no worship services are held within the temple. In fact, LDS temples are always closed on Sunday.

The three-hour block of meetings consist of Sunday school, Sacrament Meeting, and depending on age and gender either Relief Society, Priesthood meeting, Young Women's, Young Men's or Primary meetings. Primary is for children between the ages of three and twelve and the Young Women and Young Men groups are for those between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Each of the three meetings lasts approximately one hour.

Sacrament meeting is the LDS equivalent to communion. Sacrament (communion) consists of bread and water, which are blessed as a remembrance of Christ.<sup>141</sup> Priesthood holders bless the sacrament after which a group of up to eight priesthood holders, aged twelve and up, take trays of the blessed bread (or water) and pass it to the congregation. The bread is ordinary loaf bread that can be purchased at any grocery store and the water is tap water. The bread and

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<sup>141</sup> I asked LDS missionaries why bread and water is used. I was told that the service is a remembrance of Christ, and not meant to represent the actual body and blood of Christ, so anything can be used. Initially wine was used, but they did not know when the water was substituted for the wine. My guess is that after the Word of Wisdom prohibiting the drinking of alcohol was established water became the standard. The missionaries also suggested that because tap water and regular store bought bread are usually both easy to obtain and relatively cheap that may be why the Church prefers to use those items.

water are prepared (bread broken into bite size pieces, and water poured into small plastic cups) prior to the beginning of the meeting. Trays containing the bread and water are placed on a small table to the right of the pulpit and covered by a large white cloth.

The passing of the sacrament involves the congregation who serve each other. The sacrament is first given to the highest-ranking leader present (usually the bishop, but and also be a visiting leader who has a higher ranking position such as stake president) then passed to the general congregation. The men will take a sacrament tray and pass it to the person at the end of a pew, that person will take a piece of broken bread (or small cup of water), then pass the tray to the person next to them and so on down the row. This is repeated until everyone in the congregation has been served. Partaking of the sacrament is left up to the individual and no one is excluded. However prior to the passing of the sacrament no direction, such as that given in Episcopal services about it being the Lord's table, are given. As such visitors may feel slightly confused as to whether they are welcome to partake of the sacrament or not. When I questioned Mormons about this I was told that taking the sacrament is between the individual and God, and it is up to the person to decide if they are "worthy" to take the sacrament. Some say they abstain from taking the sacrament if they feel they have not fully repented for committing some sin. Others say that being excluded from taking the sacrament is part of disciplinary measures such as being disfellowshipped or excommunicated, but such details are supposed to be private between the individual and his or her bishop. Since the sacrament is passed from person to person, rather than given to individuals by a priest, it really is up to the individual to decide whether to take the bread and water as it is passed down the pew, or to simply pass the tray along without partaking. When I have specifically asked bishops if I am eligible to take the sacrament I have been told that since the act is a remembrance of baptism, and since I had been baptized, it is my choice

whether I choose to take the sacrament or not. They usually point out that small children who have not been baptized but who are being raised in the Church are given the sacrament, because they are learning to live the principles of the Church, and I am no different. I was told that it may be the case that other bishops would not agree, but they felt it was really up to the individual to do what he or she felt was right. So while the confusion around who can or cannot take the sacrament was not entirely dissipated, it does emphasize the fact that Mormons are encouraged to exercise personal discernment (even revelation) in such matters and it discloses an atmosphere of inclusion.

Another point that is confusing to visitors is the general structure of the sacrament meeting and the fact that Mormons never stand to sing hymns. Over the years I have taken several first-time visitors to LDS meetings and have learned to place my hand lightly on their shoulder to keep them from reflexively popping up out of their seat the minute the organ starts. Unlike other Christian churches, there is no sermon, no call and response reading of scriptures, no common prayer recitations. Without such rote structure visitors sometimes get confused about their role in the meeting. I usually tell visitors that nothing is expected of them at all; LDS services are passive, and all that the congregants are required to do is sit back and listen. There is not even a donation plate passed so you are not even expected to contribute money during the meeting (Mormons pay tithing on an individual basis rather than funds being collected from the group during Sunday meetings). Standard meetings consist of a hymn, a prayer, announcements, a sacrament hymn, the blessing and passing of the sacrament, a speaker, another hymn, another speaker, a closing hymn, and finally a closing prayer. Depending on the ward (or branch) sacrament meeting is either the first or last of the three meetings.

Depending on how many wards are using the building, the beginning times of the three-hour block and the order of the meetings may vary. Usually the first meeting is held at 9:00 a.m., but some may not begin until 1:00 p.m.<sup>142</sup> As mentioned above, dressy attire is preferred. Men usually wear suits, or at least a white shirt and tie (no jacket) with dark dress slacks. Women wear dresses or skirts (most women no longer wear hose). Children are expected to be small replicas of their parents, and it is not uncommon to see even new born baby boys wearing ties to church. All that being said, in wards that are in warm climates, that have a lot of visitors, or are in inner city areas, dress codes are much more relaxed and it is not uncommon for women to wear pants. I have seen women wear pants in several different LDS wards, and I myself wore pants once to see how I would be received. I found that what I wore really had no impact on the way I was treated. Perhaps it would be different if I were not a visitor, but again, I have seen women in Salt Lake wear pants, even jeans, to meetings on a regular basis (i.e., they are not visitors).

In general, I find that most non-members are afraid they will not be welcome to visit LDS churches and are very nervous about attending on their own. I wonder if perhaps part of this apprehension is that they feel they will become a target for aggressive proselyting. When I asked an LDS friend about this he said, “well, we surely welcome everyone, but visitors may have a valid concern about being singled out by the ward missionaries.”<sup>143</sup> Another thing that may make visitors feel unwelcome is that there is no “coffee hour” or social gathering after services; everyone seems to bolt for the door the minute the last amen is said. This may make visitors feel that Mormons are not interested in getting to know them, or maybe even feel that they are being purposefully avoided because they are outsiders. Unfortunately other elements may feed into this

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<sup>142</sup> If you do decide to visit an LDS service, be sure to check LDS.org or Mormon.org/worship to find the time and location of meetings.

<sup>143</sup> Personal conversation dated December 9, 2011.

last point. LDS bishops, unlike other Christian leaders, do not meet the congregation at the back door and shake people's hands as they leave. Since LDS bishops have other full-time jobs, they must take care of more things on Sunday and always have meetings immediately after services. LDS bishops are notorious for darting out the side door of the chapel and retiring behind the closed door of their office as soon as the meeting block is over. Members and non-members alike are told that if they would like to meet with the bishop they should call the ward clerk and set up a meeting. While this means that the bishop actually is available and willing to meet with individuals, having to request a meeting is seen as impersonal and uninviting. So if non-members see that the only people who go out of their way to talk to them are the missionaries, they feel like a project/object of conversion instead of a person and quickly lose interest. Granted, not all wards are so impersonal and uninviting, but enough of them are so as to create a stereotype of Mormons not wanting to talk to outsiders.

### Conclusion

The lived experience of Mormonism is steeped in a faith in LDS doctrine and teachings. In order to gain a better understanding of the LDS religion and culture, it is important to provide the reader with a background into LDS history, and a past immersed in themes of family and care. The threads of family, kinship, and care are woven throughout each element of my argument, and central to my discussion is the way that Mormons apply an idea of family as first presented by Joseph Smith in his theory of "human family" (Smith, 1978 vol. 3:387).

The goal of this chapter has been to give the reader some general background information so that as the dissertation continues the reader has some context of both the remarkable, and the everydayness, of Mormonism. Describing how Mormons approach their religious tradition as a restored gospel helps point out some of the similarities and differences between Mormonism and

other Christian groups. Understanding the ways that Mormons are a “peculiar people” helps reveal the ways that they embrace certain codes of conduct and helps us see how Mormon identity is shaped. Gaining a familiarity with the bureaucratic structures which include elements of race, age, and gender helps the reader better comprehend how local congregations fit into the larger whole.

Now that we have a fuller understanding of LDS history and a taste of LDS culture, we can go on to explore the theme of this project: the place of family in Mormon communities. In the next chapter I will discuss the place of family in society and compare how Mormon thought either mirrors or disagrees with common ideas about family.



## Chapter Four: Society: Social Instances of Family

### Hymn #250: We Are All Enlisted<sup>144</sup>

*The young man I am interviewing is in his mid-twenties, has been married for about three years and has no children. I ask him how important the Church's emphasis on family is to him and he immediately answers "huge! It is of huge importance. The family is central to God's plan."*<sup>145</sup>

The interview snippet above, as well as the one I used at the beginning of this dissertation, illustrates how most Mormons readily embrace the idea that the family unit is eternal in nature and is central to God's plan. Along with family being central to God's plan, most Mormons also believe that family is central to society.

This chapter concerns itself with family rhetoric. Family as the cornerstone of society is a nearly ubiquitous idea that is not unique to Mormonism. There is a near crusade for centrist family values that underpins current debates against gay marriage. The argument that groups against gay marriage make, in states like Utah and Michigan, is that given the importance of family in society, the family unit (meaning a heteronormative model) must be protected; gay marriage is viewed as a threat to both family and society. The idea of family as central to society and morality may have begun when Aristotle, writing against the works of Socrates and Plato who felt the family should be abolished, professed that since the state (society) is comprised of households, management of the household has a direct effect on the management of the state (Aristotle, *Politics* 1253b3).

In this chapter I will present general ideas about family and society and how LDS ideas of family are either the same or dissimilar. I will also present several popular debates on the place of family in society and show how commonly held ideas of family and kinship fit with the

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<sup>144</sup> LDS hymn #250 (CJCLDS, 1985). This hymn is listed under the topic of faith and reflects the themes of adversity and conflict which are abundant in Mormonism.

<sup>145</sup> Personal interview conducted April 2, 2013.

LDS idea of family. There is a strong connection between Mormon thought and what some may label as conservative sociologists' thought on the family; therefore, this chapter presents discussions from those sociologists as a way of illuminating Mormon thought.<sup>146</sup> The reader will soon find that individual topics of strong families, religious values, modernization, marriage and gender are all tightly interwoven. While this may seem somewhat confusing initially, it accurately reflects the ways that society and religion do not operate in a vacuum—individuals and religious institutions are part of a bigger whole that is constantly trying to make meaning of its existence. This chapter then is a look at one slice of that meaning making process as it considers the place of family in society.

#### Place of Family in Society

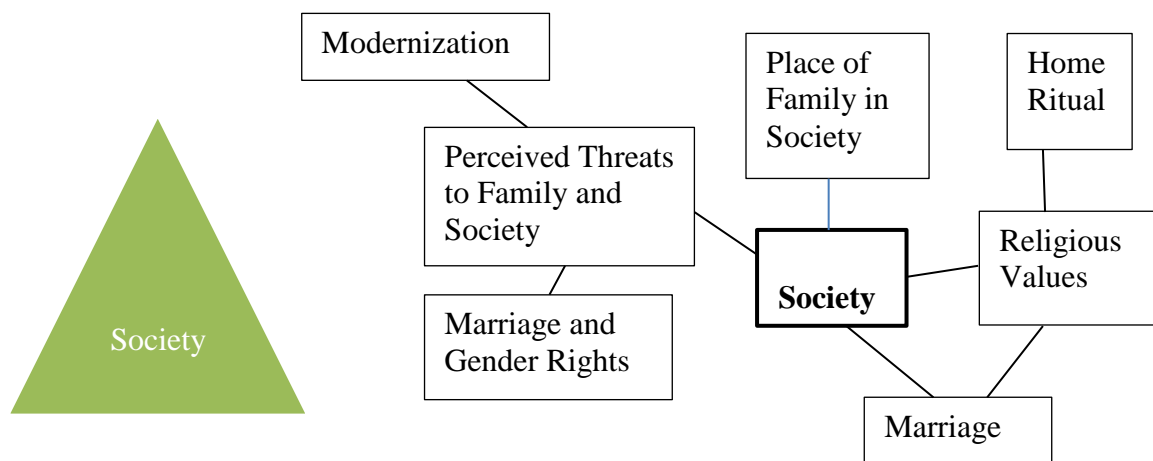
A key element in Durkheim's theories is that religion, and family structures, are innately social. His theory concerning the conjugal family (family through blood relation) began with the assertion that there was a definite relation between the social institutions of family and marriage and other forms of social organizations. He did not accept the widespread belief that kinship was based entirely on consanguinity, but rather suggested that kinship depended as much on a set of rights and duties that were sanctioned by society as on the element of cohabitation and common ancestors (Lukes, 1973:181-82). Further, Durkheim notes that family solidarity depends on the people we are attached to and the domestic goods those people share (Simpson, 1965:534). These domestic goods include the transmission of products and labor as in the case of building an inheritance for future generations. Later in this chapter I will return to discuss Durkheim's thoughts on the effect of modernization on the family.

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<sup>146</sup> By conservative I mean those such as David Popenoe who strongly support the "traditional" heteronormative family as the only legitimate (moral and justifiable) model of family that contributes to a strong society.

I certainly had Durkheim’s theories in mind when I proposed my model for the symbolic system of family in chapter one. As this model indicates, the place of family in society reflects social instances of family rather than actual family units. When I say “social instances” I am referring to the ways that family is thought about or talked about in society. Social instances of family are different than actual family units, yet both influence the other. Part of the task of this chapter is to tease out the ways we use actual family units in thinking about social instances of family in society.

For this study, the instances of family within society that I explored centered around beliefs about family such as the idea that strong families are an integral part of strong societies, that the family is “under attack” (threatened) and how those ideas influence and are influenced by social issues such as religious values, marriage rights, and modernization.



### **Society: Social instances and rhetoric of family**

Society: Social instances and rhetoric of family

As I probed the field for literature regarding ideas on family and community, I found three major discussions on the general topic of family: strong families, religious values, and the

threat of modernization. First is the idea of strong families. As mentioned in chapter four, it is a widely held assumption that a “traditional family” actually exists and that it plays a central role in society. It is assumed that traditional families are “strong” families, and are positively correlated with, or even equate to, a strong society, and conversely, that a perceived decline in the traditional family or traditional family values will culminate in the decline of society. Therefore, parallel to this topic is a discussion on perceived threats to the family unit.

The second major discussion includes religious values. For Mormons, strong family values are strong religiously based values. This inextricably links family and religion and deems both as the source of social morality. Marriage rights ties ideas about religious values and perceived threats together, especially in LDS rhetoric and thought. Third, that in this postindustrial age, both religion and the family are perceived to be threatened by modernization and globalization (although there are also benefits, attention seems to be focused on modernization and globalization as threats). All of these discussions are of great concern to Mormons and their perceived duty to Church and society.

Mormons are highly engaged in their communities, perhaps due to the strong emphasis the Church leaders place on civic involvement. From its beginnings, Mormons have argued that upholding civic (or citizens’) duties and responsibilities were part and parcel of upholding religious responsibilities (Yorgason, 2003:143-48). In other words, to be a good Mormon is to be a good citizen. I found this evident in my interviews. When I asked one older man what he would like others to know about him as a Mormon he told me “that we are a family that believes in heavenly father and we want to live our religion and be good citizens and good neighbors.”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Personal interview conducted August 23, 2012.

The underlying belief is that getting involved in the community helps make both the community and society at large, better (Putnam & Campbell, 2010:363).<sup>148</sup> Mormons are also strong supporters of the idea that the family is under attack. Robust and frequent cries that the family is under attack are made with great consistency in many LDS settings. General Conference sermons are a regular source for such rhetoric. Take for example the sermon “Becoming Goodly Parents” given by Elder L. Tom Perry in October 2012.

Lessons taught in the home by goodly parents are becoming increasingly important in today’s world, where the influence of the adversary (Satan) is so widespread. As we know, he is attempting to erode and destroy the very foundation of our society—the family. In clever and carefully camouflaged ways, he is attacking commitment to family life throughout the world and undermining the culture and covenants of faithful Latter-day Saints. Parents must resolve that teaching in the home is a most sacred and important responsibility. While other institutions such as church and school can assist parents to “train up a child in the way he [or she] should go” (Proverbs 22:6), this responsibility ultimately rests on the parents. According to the great plan of happiness, it is goodly parents who are entrusted with the care and development of Heavenly Father’s children (Perry, 2012).

Themes of the “adversary” (Satan) attempting to erode the family, which is the foundation of society, are common. When the family is linked with God (as in “The Proclamation”) any perceived threat against the family is seen as a threat from the adversary of God. It may be possible to say that, for Mormons, social instances of family, including the three elements just described, are religious instances. Within Mormonism, the difference between religious and social instances (or elements) of family are often blurred.

### **Strong Families = Strong Societies**

Doxa of family found within Church rhetoric and narratives within general society include the assumption that strong families are directly linked with strong societies. The idea that society needs to concern itself with the affairs of the household in order to be a good society is a

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<sup>148</sup> Of course, not everyone agrees with this point. I will return to discuss this further in chapter seven.

commonly held belief. Sociologist David Popenoe (1995), founder of the National Marriage Project,<sup>149</sup> clearly links weakened family units with failing society and a decline in social virtue. In Mormonism this idea is made very clear in “The Proclamation” which states that “family (is) the fundamental unit of society” (CJCLDS, 1995) and that the “disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets” (ibid).

Connecting family and society seems to be a natural fit, since it is the case that society is comprised of individuals who have all had a family of some kind, at some point in their life. Statements about the family’s connection to society are part of our accepted discourse and religious rhetoric. In addition to the ubiquitous way we consider family and society, the LDS Church has, in essence, codified family doxa. “The Proclamation” (which is accepted by Mormons as near scripture, therefore it is more than rhetoric, it is nearing Church doctrine) ends with the statement “we call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society” (CJCLDS, 1995). Yet, one does not have to be a Mormon to believe that strong families are equated with strong societies. As a society we often just simply assume such statements are true without having to have them decreed by religious leaders in official church documents.

Generic statements such as “strong families are the cornerstone of strong societies” or “strong societies need strong families” are so commonplace that we have accepted them as true without needing supporting evidence of their claim. They are structuring statements that we, as a society, forget that we constructed. This is a common phenomenon that psychologists such as Andri Cimpian, Amanda Brandone, and Susan Gleman (2010) have researched in an attempt to

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<sup>149</sup> The National Marriage Project is now directed by sociologist Bradford Wilcox.

discover why we are prone to make such claims and then believe them *carte blanche*. They found that although generic statements are based on weak evidence, the truth of the statements is rarely questioned, especially after the statements have become part of accepted discourse. Such statements “take on a life of their own, turning what may have originally been a nuanced, contextualized fact into a definitive pronouncement” (Cimpian, et al., 2010:1473).

Cimpian and his colleagues show how we tend to take generic statements and apply them to real-world processes such as political discourse. We are especially prone to do this if we have some experience with the topic of the sentence and we find the statements to be gripping in some way. For instance, if the statement implies a danger, the statement is more likely to be accepted in its generic form (1457).<sup>150</sup> All of these elements apply to statements about family. We all have some experience with family, we have emotional responses to issues around family, and some Church issued statements include direct implications of danger. The element of danger is explicit in the “The Proclamation” where it warns that nations and individuals will experience calamities should the family unit disintegrate (CJCLDS, 1995).

My research seems to support Cimpian, Brandone, and Gleman’s findings as I found that the vast majority (nearly 100%) of those I interviewed made generic statements such as “the backbone of a strong or stable society is a strong and stable family.”<sup>151</sup> The frequency of these statements may be attributed to the fact that Church authorities have spent a lot of time and money declaring the importance of family relationships. Church promoted media spots (television ads) and Church programs teach that stable relationships are “fundamental to a healthy society” (May, 2001:69). LDS missionaries have told me that they are instructed to talk to potential converts about the importance of family as a way of piquing interest in the Church.

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<sup>150</sup> An example of a statement in its generic form is “lorches have purple feathers” as opposed to a more specific, and more accurate form which would be “most lorches have purple feathers.”

<sup>151</sup> Personal interview conducted June 30, 2012.

Thoughts about the importance of family are also reflected in local Utah news. On March 22, 2012, the LDS Church owned newspaper the *Deseret News* ran a front page article “Society’s cornerstone” which quotes Jenanette Herbert (wife of Governor Herbert) as saying that “if we are going to have a strong, viable state, we have got to have strong, viable families” (Leonard, 2012b).<sup>152</sup> Both Herbert, and those I interviewed, present such statements as fact and offer them as “proof” that strong families were a necessary part of society. These statements were also used to underpin discussions on the importance of marriage, a stable family life, and time spent together as a family. In Herbert’s case she is using the statement to suggest the importance of attending parenting workshops offered by “Uplift Utah Families” an organization promoting strong families. Herbert stated that the vision of her organization is “to promote happiness, prosperity and societal stability through strong families and meaningful parent-child relationships.”<sup>153</sup> Although I have no proof that this is an LDS driven program, it is sponsored by many LDS owned enterprises (such as Deseret News, KBYU television, Bonneville Communications, and Zion’s Bank).

As will be discussed in chapter five’s section on the LDS marriage culture, Mormons are particularly interested in marriage and keeping families together. Mormons, however, are not the only ones interested in such matters. Scholars like Harvard law professor MaryAnn Glendon (1995), who specializes in family law, are interested in the connection between strong (stable) families and society. Glendon points to fatherless homes as the source of “social and material deprivation” (1995:1) that amounts to a social crisis. A crisis, she claims, that leads to adverse consequences such as a decline in “the quality of the nation’s work force” leading the US to lose its edge in the world economy, situations wherein “crime and delinquency will spiral every more

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<sup>152</sup> Governor Herbert and his wife are LDS.

<sup>153</sup> Uplift families website <http://upliftutahfamilies.org/> accessed November 2, 2013.



wildly out of control” (Glendon, 1995:1). Glendon fails to support these statements with any data or research, but seems to be basing her claims on the common assumption that weakened families (i.e. fatherless families) equate to a weakened society. Glendon seems to be using a generic statement to promote an assumed truth in order to lobby for family law. Like LDS apologists, Glendon’s scholarship is also influenced by her faith. Glendon is a conservative Catholic who regularly speaks out against abortion (McClarey, 2009). I use her works to illustrate some of the similarities Mormonism has with other conservative thinkers, and to demonstrate how rhetoric about families and the state of society becomes part of a common discourse. Such discourse, as Cimpian et al. suggests, does have an impact; and such impact may not be completely random.

Sociologist Judith Stacey (1996) stated that between 1993 and 1995 both the Democrat and the Republican parties used family value rhetoric to rationalize shifts in welfare to programs centered on prisons and police. These shifts were rationalized by claims that single-mother families are to blame for the rising numbers of criminals in the United States (Stacey, 1996:4). Applied research specialist James H. Derzon’s 2010 research illustrated that despite “the near ubiquitous acknowledgement that family experiences [including single motherhood]” are assumed to be the most responsible for antisocial outcomes, “most family features are associated only modestly with the likelihood of antisocial behavior” (288). Derzon acknowledged that indeed there are many sources of antisocial behavior and that instituting family-based programming is “likely to have only a modest effect in a general population for preventing or reducing antisocial behavior” (290). He added that his study should provide sound motivation for reducing the rhetoric which holds the family structure responsible for society’s ills.

In contrast to Derzon's approach, conservative sociologists tend to agree with Glendon's position on fatherless families (Bellah, et al., 1991:47-48). They also add, however, that the economy and corporate culture needs more attention as a source of strain on both the family and society. The state of the current economy nearly demands a two wage income, yet corporations do little to support the needs of families. The long and inflexible working hours corporations set for their employees, and low minimum wages, are destructive to family life (Bellah et al., 1991:48). More recently, sociologist Annette Lareau illustrated how parents' social class negatively impacts children's life experiences; especially children of working class and poor families (2003:3). Stating those and other reasons, Bellah and others believe that the weakening of the family unit is more complex than merely simply insuring that all families have both a father and mother at home. They additionally suggest that American institutions (including family, school, and corporations) need to be transformed to better meet the welfare needs of individuals and families in order to establish a "good society" (Bellah, et al., 1991:49).

Sociologist David Popenoe agrees to an extent, but adds, what he views, as an important, previously unstated element—the place of virtue. Popenoe states that social virtue (morality and ethics in general) is in decline because there is a decline in both family functioning and community functioning (1995:98). Popenoe believes that in order to help restore social virtue: "we as a nation should seek to protect and cultivate natural communities, preferably along residential lines. As individuals, we should seek to stay married, stay accessible to our children, stay active in our local communities, and stay put" (ibid).

By claiming that a social environment that does not support family functioning produces anti-social behavior, Popenoe seems to be pointing to codes of conduct in individuals, families, and communities, as a source of social virtue (1995:71). Mormons would agree with Popenoe in

seeing that family and individual conduct has an affect on society. Both may agree that virtue has a social facet and that social institutions such as families have a responsibility to insure proper conduct of their children who will grow up to having developed socially responsible behavior in the home (Popenoe, 1995:74; CJCLDS, 1995). When groups or individuals talk about virtue, and codes of conduct, they are often also including elements of religious values.

### **Religious Values**

It could be argued that the American dream comes out of Protestantism. Religious values are deeply entrenched in American culture. Protestantism, in general, has equated the American dream of property ownership, economic success, and upward social mobility, with being favored by God (Weber, 2003 [1958]). Therefore, economic success or failure is seen as a sign of divine reward or punishment as well as a sign of moral failure. Given that the American (or traditional) family is seen as the gatekeeper of morality, moral ideals and values become family ideals and family ideals become religious ideals, and vice versa, as religious ideal are often the source of those moral ideals (Weber, 2003 [1958]: 95-98; Fishburn, 1991:72-73).

Religious institutions and families depend on each other. Certainly Mormonism is closely tied to the American dream of upward social mobility, yet it also contains elements reflected in ancient Hebrew thought and the nation of Israel. Ancient Hebrew culture had strong patriarchal attitudes concerning women, family life, and sexuality. Hebrews felt that establishing laws and regulations in these areas helped ensure social stability through family harmony (Fishburn, 1991:97). Just as upward mobility was a sign of God's favor in Protestantism, a sense of peace and stability in family life was a special status of the nation of Israel (98).

Edgell noted that in the United States, religious institutions have promoted an ideology of familism that points to the family as the central and most fundamental unit of society. Religious

institutions support this ideology by providing moral socialization for a family-centered lifestyle. It is assumed that religious involvement flows naturally, even automatically, from groups who have family as a central focus of their identity (Edgell, 2006:29).

Further deepening the relationship between religion and family is a combination of explicit and implicit meanings in both talk and practice. For many Protestant churches, this means the combination of rhetoric about the family and church ministries (Edgell, 2006:125-6). Edgell invoked Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* in addressing the embedded meanings in actions. She stated that practices within the congregation are organized around reproducing a religious tradition, but also around "building a caring community for members" (127). In Edgell's study, evidence of a caring community is found in church programs such as daycare centers, family counseling, language classes, and other programs designed to help families cope with their temporal needs.

Speaking in terms of family in society, I found that for Mormons, the biggest connection between religion and family is the construction of individual and group identity that anchors the lived religious experience in a social context. The LDS social construction of family as presented in "The Proclamation" contains assumed truth statements about the divine nature of family. That text is re-contextualized in the community setting of Church programs designed to "strengthen the family" and welfare programs designed to help families with their temporal needs. The re-contextualization of family is further anchored in the home in the form of home ritual (which I will discuss in the next chapter). The overall process of entextualization of religious values is affixed in the twin foundations of religion and family. It is that foundation that supports the further construction of a Mormon identity.

### Perceived Threats to Family and Society

Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon (1995) argued that it is a “widely recognized” (1) fact that American families are deteriorating and that the break-down of the American family is “society’s most serious long-term problem” (3). Since families are such an integral part of society, she suggested that in order to protect society, we need to protect traditional family units. But what are we protecting them from? What are the threats to family and society?

Rather than assuming that a positive correlation between fatherless families and social ills equates to cause and effect, as Glendon, a conservative Catholic does, we must carefully consider family patterns in society, and throughout history, to more correctly determine why some believe they are witnessing the deterioration of the family. Are families really “deteriorating” or in some way “in decline”? Could it be possible that we are seeing the social facts of change and variation rather than “decline”?

In the early 1900s Émile Durkheim cautioned those in the newly budding field of sociology about maintaining objectivity in observing what he called “social facts.” He points out that just as ethnic characteristics vary, social life must also vary. As a case in point he offers the example of variances in family structure. In Rome and Greece where the city state existed, Jews developed patriarchal family units; among the Slavs and Arabs, who lacked a city state, maternal clans were the norm (Durkheim, 1982:132-33). Therefore, rather than immediately assuming that something was amiss in Slavic and Arabic families, (e.g. that Slavic families were in decline) one must consider how the ethnic characteristics varied from Jewish families. If one were to assume that Slavic and Arabic families were in decline it would be an inaccurate assessment of their social reality. Social development and reality is complex, and when observing social organizations we must take historical development in to consideration if we are to establish

causal relationships (Durkheim, 1982:138). In other words, one simply cannot accurately assert a cause without first thoroughly understanding the perceived effect. With this in mind I would challenge Glendon's assumptions about family patterns in society and push her to widen her scope when observing social facts such as familial stability.

In 1955 Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales suggested that the nuclear family is an "artificially stabilized and simplified social object" (1955:137) implying that stability is not a natural state for the family unit. In 1988 sociologist David Popenoe disregarded both Durkheim and Parsons' and Bales' provisos and used case studies based in Sweden to prove that American families are in a state of decline. The argument of his book *Disturbing the Nest: Family Change and Decline in Modern Societies* (1988) is that the modernization that is occurring in Sweden negatively impacts families there, and from that concluded that modernization (which includes secularization) will have the same effect on all families in all developed Western societies (Popenoe, 1988:xi). By "decline" Popenoe meant that the family as an institution is growing weaker by losing its social power and social functions, in short, "becoming less important in life" (xii). This decline, he said, amounts to a state of crisis and threatens the future of the modern family as an important social institution. He then re-interpreted Swedish families as all families, and equated Sweden with all Western societies. Popenoe's objective was to show a global tendency in changes to the family unit; changes that he interpreted as a state of decline which weakened family loyalty and its cultural value. As such, some of his biggest concerns were individualization, and social values. While he does make some strong points about structural change (decline in marriage and birth rates) one of his biggest mistakes was to insert the unstated assumption that any form of family other than a heteronormative nuclear family is inherently flawed and of lesser cultural value. Ten years after his first work, Popenoe published an article

“American Family Decline, 1960-1990: A Review and Appraisal” in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (1993) which seemed to strike a nerve prompting a flurry of responses to his works. Several scholars including Stacey (1993), Glenn (1993), Coontz, (1997), and Cowan (1993), all weighed-in on Popenoe’s theory; most of them agreeing that his analysis was “seriously awry” (Cowan, 1993:548).

In her response, Judith Stacey made a statement that most resonates with my work; she believed that there is no positivist definition of family, family is not an institution but rather an “ideological, symbolic construct that has a history and a politics” (1993:545). Similar to Durkheim, Stacey reminded us, that the family unit is not static; it is a product of long historical transformations (1996:39). Domestic arrangements evolve to adapt to social changes such as industrialization and modernization and our ideas about family evolves as well. Coontz agreed and stated that our ideas about the structure of family are more illusion than fact (1997).<sup>154</sup>

Glenn (1993) agreed with Popenoe’s theory that the family is in decline if by decline Popenoe is pointing to the function of family in society. Glenn argued that the family has become a highly specialized institution with two core functions: child rearing and providing affection and companionship for family members. Although Glenn agreed with Popenoe’s overall findings, he criticized Popenoe for not accurately accessing the effects of the perceived decline, especially in regard to gender roles. Cowan’s (1993) analysis of Popenoe’s is similar to Glenn’s. He agreed that there are definite changes in the function of family as an institution. While Cowan found fault with Popenoe’s argument, he stated that a deeper look at the causes of change were needed before we are able to answer any questions regarding the structure and function of family in society. This is, in part, what Linda Gordon’s work had done five years earlier.

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<sup>154</sup> I will return to discuss this point more fully in chapter 6.

Cultural historian Linda Gordon illustrated how periods of social stress tend to escalate fears of a decline of the “traditional family” (1988:3). Beginning in 1870s and continuing through the great depression, the atmosphere of social stress led to escalated “family violence.”<sup>155</sup> Anxiety over the increasing independence for women fueled fears that family politics and structure were changing and were the cause for an increase in unacceptable abuse. Then, as now, it was assumed that if families merely followed the proscribed “traditional” model of what families were supposed to be like, they would cease behaving in ways contrary to that ideal. In that heated social atmosphere, many felt that some sort of social control was necessary in order to protect or defend the family (Gordon, 1988:3-4). As a result, defending the “conventional” or “nuclear family” was a major characteristic of Depression-era social work. Gordon stated that policies such as the “defend-the-conventional-family” which began in that era, continued straight through the 1940s and 1950s” (22-23).<sup>156</sup>

It would be wrong, however, to assume that the presence of more traditional families in society is a guarantee of a decrease in the rate of domestic violence. Ethicist Traci West agreed that repairing some of the “broken” functions of social and family order will alleviate domestic violence, but she pointed out that violence is a multipronged societal issue that involves elements of race, age, economics and social status. Elder abuse and violence between siblings are part of the social disorder often overlooked when the focus is on fatherless families. West (1999) asked “how would one ensure that the interests of women are guarded and well served by increased social control over the family and community” (106)? West also emphasized the fact that “male violence is directly spawned by a wide web of societal violence” which includes the “systemic

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<sup>155</sup> A term that Gordon uses to include all forms of domestic violence including child and spouse abuse that arise out of power struggles within the family (Gordon, 1988:3).

<sup>156</sup> The U.S. social work policy “defend-the-conventional-family” was established to address family violence.



evils of white supremacy and patriarchy” that devalue human worth (ibid:4-5). Race and gender then, cannot be overlooked in issues of either domestic violence, or family structure.

Like our ideas about family, our ideas about sexuality and gender are also in constant flux. By the 1960s issues such as access to birth control, the civil rights, women’s rights, and anti-war movements and popular television programs began to challenge family norms in new ways. Public attitudes and behaviors were changing and people appeared to be rethinking “traditional” values. This was perhaps most explicitly illustrated by the “sexual revolution” brought about by new forms of birth control as discussed in chapter one.

Many religious groups felt that new attitudes and behaviors toward sex threatened familial well-being. Fidelity in sexual relationships was associated with family solidarity, commitment and Christian values and morality. Cahill pointed out that for many Christians, changes in sexual behavior were seen as direct threats to family values and structure (2000:134-35). This is based on the assumption that without a firm commitment, couples may be prone to divorce. The LDS Church’s strict moral codes regulating sexual behavior may have had an influence on the reduced rate of premarital sex among Mormons (Heaton, 1988:108-09), but as I will discuss in chapter five, Mormons divorce at the same rate as the general population (Poll, 2001:174).

Historians Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg reported that by the 1980s, only fifteen percent of American families fit the “traditional” model of a breadwinner father, housewife mother, and one or more dependent children (1987:203). Divorce rates soared creating a dramatic increase in the number of single-parent households which quickly began to be referred to as “broken-homes” (203-04). If we take the gender roles of father/breadwinner, mother/housewife out of the parameters and just look at family structure we find a similar, albeit

less dramatic, picture. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that in 1970 family households (married couples with children) were dominant making up 80% of all households. By 2012 that figure had dropped to 66%. And naturally other family households (married couples without children, non-married couples, singles) increased from 11% to 18% between 1970 and 2012 (Vespa, Lewis and Kreider, 2013).

Sex became a bigger part of public discourse. Anxiety over the sexual revolution of the sixties continued as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) began to spread in the eighties. Anxiety over single parenthood was reflected in popular television programs. Perhaps the best known reaction to the topic of sex within a television sitcom happened in the early 1990s when Dan Quayle (running as vice-president to George H. Bush) condemned the television sitcom character, Murphy Brown, for having a child out of wedlock (Coontz, 1997:1). As mentioned above, fatherless families were often blamed for the ills of society; therefore, to have a popular television character deliberately choose such a fate for herself was seen as an attack not only on American values but on the American (i.e. traditional) family unit (Coontz, 1997). Nearly twenty years later, we are still discussing how non-traditional family choices, sexual behavior, and family structure are a threat to families and society.

To conclude this chapter I will discuss two main ways that Mormons feel the family is being threatened: through modernization and through movements that address marriage and gender rights.

### **Modernization and Industrialization**

Sociologists have varying theories about the effects of modernization and secularization, but most focus on how modernization causes *change* in family units rather than viewing the perceived change as a decline in the existence of family units in society. For Durkheim (1982),

industrialization and modernization seemed to usher in an era of individuality that took focus away from family solidarity. However, rather than viewing this as a threat to families, he saw that these forces were causing the family unit to *change*. Examples of what Durkheim meant by *change* can be considered as historical shifts in the nature of family. Shifts such as that from clan-family to agnatic family (kin related by patrilineal lineage); or from agnatic family to conjugal family (related by blood or marriage). For Durkheim, families had not *declined*, rather, their formal organization had merely changed (Lamanna, 2002:46, 93).

Goode's 1963 work *World Revolution and Family Patterns*, offered an outline of the ways that he sees industrialization and urbanization affecting and changing family systems on a global basis, or what he calls "world changes in family patterns" (Goode, 1963:1). Overall Goode felt that family systems, on a global scale, were moving toward some form of the conjugal system that usually meant a group of generations of kin which includes children, parents, and grandparents (Goode, 1963:368). Yet, he also thought that when an individual society becomes industrialized, descent groupings such as kindred or lineage weaken and decay (Goode, 1982 [1964]:127).

Goode presented the tension between nuclear families and kin networks in industrialized nations, as being exacerbated by external social forces. Forces such as political problems, the increase in divorce rates, decrease in the influence of corporate kin groups (clans), increase in women's rights and the number of working women, increased sexual freedom, increasing age at marriage for women, and a decline in birth rate, were initially assumed to be forces that would move family units away from the conjugal (kinship network) model. Goode found however that the measurable results of these influences was continued high participation and interaction with kin networks, and high reliance on relatives for help in the case of extended illness. In short,

Goode found that “the extended kin network continues to function and to include a wide range of kin who share with one another, see one another frequently, and know each other” (1963:75).

Goode also suggested that the family system may recursively influence industrialization. He suggested that as Protestantism spread in the United States in the early nineteenth century, family systems defined husband and wife as loving companions rather than as elements of a family network. This meant that the family unit was independent, allowing more freedom not only in marriage partners, but also in mobility and individual independence; this independence also allowed workers to accept new factory jobs or to move for corporate positions. In other words, the family system was in harmony with the new demands of industrialization, and industrialization was facilitated by a family system that provided a ready source of workers (Goode, 1963:22-23; 1982 [1964]: 182-91).

Sociologist David Popenoe, whose work has focused on promoting heteronormative marriage, takes a different approach. Popenoe noted that “personal pathology and community disorder” (1995:85) are two of the social costs of modernity. He relates this directly to the family and stated that “the gradual weakening of family and community ties, in short, of the traditional forms of social connectedness, has generated an alarming increase in community disorder” (ibid). Some examples of “community disorder” that Popenoe offers are violent crime, suicide, substance abuse, eating disorders, psychological stress, anxiety, and unipolar depression (1988:71). Popenoe stated that this is especially the case in the United States where we have attempted to rid ourselves of the tribal mentality, favoring individualism instead. This has led to a weakening of group identities and group ties which, to him, is out of sync with human nature.

Popenoe’s thoughts resonate with LDS Church and its members. Rather than seeing a change in family patterns, the LDS Church unwaveringly claims that “the traditional family –

father, mother, and children-is in rapid decline” (Lloyd, 2012). Speaking for the Church, LDS news staff writer Scott Lloyd attributes lifestyles which are focused on freedom and self-fulfillment as the reason behind declining birth and marriage rates, and increasing divorce rates (2012). The LDS Church has a long history of frowning upon women seeking self-fulfillment over marriage and childbearing.

Church rhetoric focuses intently on family and marriage. Early LDS literature, from 1880 to 1920, aimed at young Mormon men and women instructed them on the attributes one should possess in order to be a potential marriage partner (Yorgason, 2003:31). Being “unselfish” was a key quality for young women who were told that their family’s comfort depended on their devoting themselves completely to their husband and children. By mid-century not much had changed. LDS officials reinforced the idea that motherhood was the proper role for women. Serving as the tenth Church president, Joseph Fielding Smith stated that “the most noble, exalting calling of all is that which has been given to women as the mothers of men” (1956:178; Givens, 2004:207).

Even today, rhetoric from LDS Church officials tells Mormon women that their greatest and most sacred role is that of mother. In current general conference sermons women who sacrifice their personal “pleasures and possessions for their higher priorities (of wife and mother), seemingly without a second thought” are presented as being “love personified” (Christofferson, 2013). Speaking at the October, 2013 general conference, Mormon apostle Todd Christofferson stated that there were social trends that weakened women’s roles as mothers and homemakers. In the printed version of his sermon he is quoted as saying that it is a “pernicious philosophy that undermines women’s moral influence is the devaluation of marriage and of motherhood and homemaking as a career” (2013). In his original live sermon he said that “some

feminist thinkers view homemaking with outright contempt, arguing it demeans women and the relentless demands of raising children are a form of exploitation” (ibid).<sup>157</sup> The edited version that is published on the LDS.org website removed the words “feminist thinkers” from the sermon.

*Salt Lake Tribune* reporter Peggy Fletcher Stack notes that “slight” editing of conference sermons is not uncommon. Stack speculated that Church editors suggested the change so that readers would not assume that Christofferson was referring to “all feminist thinkers” (2013a). While it may seem that overall, the Church is stubbornly clinging to narrow views of the place of women in society, the “slight editing” that Stack points out reflects at least a level of sensitivity toward the presence of feminist thought.

As illustrated in this brief discussion on modernity, thoughts about the ways that the family unit is affected by modernization and industrialization quickly turn to ideas about gender roles and sexuality. And, when talking to Mormons, ideas about sexuality include ideas about marriage, and opposition to gay marriage rights. Therefore, I too will now turn to discuss marriage and gender rights as a perceived threat to family. Although marriage rights also support traditional family, in common rhetoric discussions around “marriage rights” are usually centered on gay marriage rights which are seen as threat to the traditional family.

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<sup>157</sup> All conference sermons are printed in the Church’s magazine the *Ensign* the month after the sermon is preached in Conference. For instance, the sermons delivered in April of 2013 are printed in the May, 2013 edition of the magazine. Additionally, all sermons can be accessed through the LDS.org website which contains video and text versions of all Conference sermons. In the case of Christofferson’s remarks, both the edited text version and the live, un-edited original video and audio recording can be found at <http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2013/10/the-moral-force-of-women?lang=eng#watch=video>. This makes taking notes verbatim during sermon unnecessary as a copy of the original remarks can always be accessed to insure that all quotes are exact. As Stack mentions, it is not unusual for the Church to edit sermons before they are printed in Church resources such as Church magazines, websites, manuals, etc.

## Marriage and Gender Rights

*Field notes: October, 27, 2008. The Sunday school teacher expresses shock that I come to services on my own without being brought by the missionaries. I tell her that I went on-line and put in a request for missionaries to come and visit me, but none came, so I came on my own. The Relief Society lesson of the day is centered on gender roles and family. The idea the teacher is trying to convey is that when everyone does their part, and expands on their natural talents, the family does better as a whole. She tells the class that gender is a fixed and pre-ordained condition that existed in the pre-life and would continue into the afterlife. The gender roles described were the quintessential, stereotypical binary models of male and female. There seemed to be a silent agreement among the women present that the man's role is to lead the family, the woman's role is to support the man and produce and raise children.*

Sociologists Robert Putnam and David Campbell report that overall, Mormon women appear to be quite happy with their prescribed gender roles. Their survey found that 90% of Mormon women were opposed to women gaining the priesthood (2010:244). Putnam and Campbell point out that satisfaction with separate roles for men and women is also common in strict religious groups such as Orthodox Jews, devout Muslims, the Amish, and Christian fundamentalists (235). Although there has been substantial change in gender roles in society, religious conservatism still favors traditional gender roles and norms. I found this to be true during the interview process.

In all of the interviews where the person being interviewed spoke specifically about the church and gender roles, there was a common assumption that gender was innate, and designed by God for a reason. The exception was that two men and one woman said that they would like to see women gain equality in certain areas, like being able to pray more often in general conference, or have rite of passage rituals or access to programs that would be similar to the boy scouts. Yet, even those three felt that gender roles played an important part in this life and in the life to come. None of those I interviewed expressed any thoughts about feeling that God loved them less or more because they were either a man or a woman. They did, however, express ideas

that it was up to God to make decisions about gender roles. This view renders gender a religious construct with social implications.

Although no one in the Sunday school class I attended raised concern over gender roles as described by the teacher, having gender ordained of God and part of a divine plan can be problematic for both LDS men and women. With the appearance of the “Ordain Women” movement gender inequality within the LDS Church is gaining visibility. While this movement emphasizes women’s inequality, it would be a mistake to assume that Mormon males are not affected by their narrowly defined gender roles. Mormon men have told me that it is not always easy living up to the ideal of provider and priesthood holder. One man told me that because there is a lot of pressure for men to go on missions, to get married, be a provider and have a family “it’s a lot to have to live up to.”<sup>158</sup> Another man told me that having well defined gender roles helps Mormons find meaning and purpose in life as part of a divine plan. The middle-aged man told me “if we didn’t have gender roles it would lead to a loss of identity and a loss of marriage ties.”<sup>159</sup> This quote reveals how closely Mormons equate marriage and gender and that discussions about gender always include the subtext of marriage.

As I discuss in chapter five, Mormon culture is, in essence, a marriage culture. For Mormons, marriage is theologically and socially necessary. The Church encourages young men to get married soon after they return from their missions, and culturally there is pressure not only to marry young, but quickly. Typically Mormons have very short courting and engagement periods.<sup>160</sup> When I questioned Mormons on this practice it became clear that most felt that if

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<sup>158</sup> Personal interview conducted June 30, 2012.

<sup>159</sup> Personal interview conducted June 30, 2012.

<sup>160</sup> I think the most stunning example of the LDS proclivity toward short courting and engagement periods was one provided by a woman who was talking about her new grandchild. She told the story of how her son came home from his two year mission in mid-December, 2011, was engaged by Christmas, married right before Valentine day of 2012, and by Thanksgiving that same year, her first grandchild had been born. It was unclear whether the boy knew his wife before he went on his mission, but it would not be unusual if he had met her just weeks before becoming



courting and engagement were too extended, “temptations” would be too great. In other words, it was assumed that if couples do not marry quickly they are too prone to succumb to the temptation to engage in pre-marital sex, which is strictly forbidden. Couples who do engage in sex before marriage are not eligible to receive a temple recommend and must get married in a civil ceremony and wait one year before then can be “sealed” in the temple. Needless to say, this is frowned upon and it is preferred that couples get married in the temple (although as the statistics that I presented in chapter five reflect, temple marriage is not a ubiquitous LDS practice). Despite this fact, Mormons are still highly concerned with groups seeking to extend marriage and gender rights that they feel threaten their religious beliefs and family units.

Generally speaking, Mormons tend to view marriage rights, specifically gay marriage, as a threat to strong families. One older man told me “I am very much against gay marriage, and the church is as well. We have to do that (be against gay marriage), to sanctify the family.”<sup>161</sup> This idea is not exclusive to Mormons and Mormonism, but as mentioned throughout this work, it is an idea that Mormonism has codified through documents such as “The Proclamation” (1995). Given that in the 1990s, when “The Proclamation” was written, same-sex marriage was not legally recognized anywhere in the world, one can see how same-sex marriage could be deemed outside the bounds of society. In a religious tradition that tends to draw very firm boundaries, one can see how being outside of the established boundaries is highly suspect. But, this stance has been continuously affirmed as same sex marriage has remained a controversial subject.

Official Church rhetoric supports these claims and assumptions as indicated in Elder Dallin H. Oaks’ October, 2012 General Conference sermon “Protect the Children.” In this

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engaged. I should also note that this cultural practice of quick courtships and marriages is not confined to young couples. I know of a middle-aged couple (man in his sixties and woman in her forties) who met, got engaged, and subsequently married all within a twelve week time span.

<sup>161</sup> Personal interview conducted February 15, 2013.

sermon Oaks discusses the dangers to child welfare such as hunger, disease, neglect, physical and psychological harm. He states that “we should assume” the same disadvantages and dangers apply to children raised by couples of the same gender, but claims that it will take time to fully understand the consequences of same-sex marriage as a “social experiment” (Oaks, 2012). Labeling same-sex marriage as a “social experiment” illustrates the tendency to view such marriages as outside the norm and lacking credibility.

It was not that long ago, however, that Mormonism itself was outside the bounds of American society and the social norm. One could also point out that Mormons have themselves practiced forms of marriage deemed as a threat to society—namely, polygamy. So why are marriage rights (namely, same-sex marriage rights or marriage equality) such a threat to families, and specifically Mormon families?

Concerning sex and sexuality, religious scholar Janet Fishburn made the observation that liberals are concerned with “rights” of individuals while “conservatives are more concerned with the ‘righteousness’ of individuals” (1991:96). For Mormons, their sense of what is “righteous” is established in Church doctrine, rhetoric, and documents such as “The Proclamation” (1995). Other conservatives often turn to the Bible, or their local minister in order to discern what is “righteous.” Sociologist Penny Edgell pointed out that conservative religious leaders often work toward blocking same-sex marriage rights, citing a moral rationale for their stand. Certainly this was the case during the 2008 when the LDS Church (and others including the Catholic Church) worked to get California’s proposition 8 (banning gay marriage) passed. Liberal religious leaders, on the other hand, advocate for same-sex marriage on religious and moral grounds (Edgell, 2006:14). Not all religious traditions have uniformity of belief on same-sex marriage. Some religious traditions such as Episcopal, Presbyterian, and United Methodist experience

internal rifts over issues of sexuality and gender. While some congregations feel that changes in family structure pose a challenge for their congregation, others feel that expanding their definition of family meets congregational spiritual needs and addresses social justice for the broader community (Edgell, 2006:94-95).

Scholars fall into similar divisive schools of thought regarding sexuality and marriage rights. David Popenoe, who started the “National Marriage Project” in 1997, states that it is only in “conventional two-parent households” wherein the “father takes a strong interest in his children’s and their mother’s welfare” that family relationships are successful (1995:76).<sup>162</sup> He feels that there is “a confirmed empirical generalization” that supports ideas that two-parent families are better equipped to raise healthy, moral children than single-parent families, or even step families. Popenoe cites a National Health Interview Survey of Child Health from 1988 that concludes that children raised by single parent or step families are “two to three times more likely to have had emotional or behavioral problems than those who had both of their biological parents present in the home” (1995:77). Other studies challenge this conclusion.

Contrary to the dated survey that Popenoe cites, more recent studies show that “families with two lesbian parents (biological, social or step) exhibited a number of strengths” (Biblarz & Savci, 2010:481). Among the strengths found are a tendency to “equal or surpass heterosexual married couples on time spent with children, parenting skill, and warmth and affection” (482). Studies by sociologists Judith Stacey and Timothy J. Biblarz show that there “are no differences in developmental outcomes between children raised by lesbigay (sic) parents and those raised by heterosexual parents” (2001:159). Stacey and Biblarz also point out how heterosexism has hampered scholarly progress in the field.

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<sup>162</sup> See <http://nationalmarriageproject.org/about/> accessed March 28, 2013.

Of course any discussion about sexuality contains discussions about gender. Given that the LDS Church has established strict guidelines about marriage, it is no surprise that they do the same for gender. Church curriculum for the “Marriage and Family Relations” Sunday School class for adults stresses the fact that marriage is between a man and a woman and that other forms of marriage are outside of God’s plan for families. As noted above, the Church assumes gender is an innate attribute and states that “gender existed before, and did not begin at mortal birth” (CJCLDS, 2000:3).

Establishing gender as a divinely appointed attribute rather than social construction may be in part what allows the Church to assign strict gender roles concerning Church governance. Very similar to the Catholic Church, and Ultra-Orthodox Judaism, the LDS Church excludes women from holding positions of priesthood based solely on gender. But outside of Church leadership position, gender rights are often seen as a threat to the family.<sup>163</sup>

The place of women in the home and in society has changed radically in the past century. The women’s rights movements have opened up new opportunities for women in the workplace and economic pressures have nearly demanded that women, who may night have worked outside the home in the past, work. Some view women working outside the home as weakening family ties and challenging men’s roles as the breadwinner (Stacey, 1996:26). Some also view women’s participation in the workforce as a threat to religious belief and participation (Hertel, 1995:82). Sociologist Bradley Hertel discovered that single women who participated in the workforce tended to have higher rates of apostasy (from any religious tradition). He suggests that these trends may point to movement away from “traditional roles in marriage and religious involvement may be part of a larger pattern that includes rejection of still other gender values and roles” (Hertel, 1995:82).

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<sup>163</sup> There are women rabbi (or Rabba) in Modern Orthodox synagogues.

While doing field research I found that the majority (70%) of women in the New Jersey congregation worked and had professional careers. While it was usually the case that families moved to New Jersey because the husband had been transferred for his job, there were cases when families relocated due to the wife's job. In Utah a larger majority of women worked (the only ones I found that did not have at least one job were retired). The interesting difference was that in New Jersey women tended to talk about their careers more often in settings such as Relief Society meetings than the women in Utah did. Yet, in both cases the first topic of discussion was almost always their families and especially their children.

Sociologist Laurence Iannaccone and economist Carrie Miles found similar results in Mormonism. Iannaccone and Miles conducted research measuring how the LDS Church's affirmation of traditional gender roles either strengthened or weakened the commitment of Mormons. They looked at temple participation between the years of 1950 and 1985. They found that as women's roles changed in society, the Church responded with an increase in the number of church published articles reinforcing traditional gender roles, especially in the 1960s and 70s (2001 [1994]:279, 291). Women reacted in two ways: older, more experienced (meaning that they have performed more temple ordinances for the dead) increased their religious participation while less experienced members did the opposite (281). They speculate that social change presents the LDS Church with dilemmas of accommodating change without undermining their claim to "transcendent truth and divine authority" (282). Miles (2008) found that women themselves face similar dilemmas.

LDS women are often torn between religiously established gender roles and personal desires. They are either torn by the fact that they are forced to work due to economic pressures while LDS leaders sternly warn them against doing so, or feel absolute anguish at being forced to

stay home with children when they long for a career of their own (Miles, 2008:125). For women who are not able to bear children or who have not had the chance to marry, they often feel both their Church and their God has forgotten them. One woman told me “I just feel that there is no place for me in the Church as a single woman—I have no value here, I just don’t fit in.”<sup>164</sup>

While some LDS women find strictly defined gender roles divisive, others find comfort in them. Other Mormon women told me that they were quite happy with their codified gender roles. One woman said “women are meant to be the help mate to men, not to rule, that’s men’s job, we need to be their rock.”<sup>165</sup> Her husband disagreed, saying he felt that women should have more equal rights. He was very happy that women were asking to have the chance to pray in general conference and felt that was a very good thing. Both felt, however, that there was confusion over doctrine and culture and that ultimately God decided the gender roles for marriage and family life. Miles’ studies seemed to support that line of thinking.

While LDS leaders are known for extoling the virtues of motherhood from the pulpit at general conference, it is still up to individual women to interpret those sermons. For Mormons, religion is a very personal thing; each individual Mormon must pray about Church teaching and come to a decision on how to apply those teachings on their own. Miles cites an example of this in her 2008 study on LDS ideas about the equality of women. She talked about a “classic example of the LDS testimony-bearing formula” (Miles, 2008:125) of using prayer and inspiration to make real life decisions. The woman in her study talks about coming to her decision to be a stay-at-home mother. The woman said she had been a graduate student planning a career in biochemistry and did not plan on being a mother. However, after joining the LDS Church she struggled to reconcile her career goals with the Church teachings of the importance

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<sup>164</sup> Personal interview conducted August 28, 2012.

<sup>165</sup> Personal interview conducted February 3, 2012.

of motherhood. She studied and prayed about her dilemma as she continued to attend church and experienced “a growing assurance in my heart of the direction I should take, and with that I abandoned the familiar women’s rights compass and the goals that came with it” (Miles, 2008:126). Still, there are others that may embrace their roles as mother, but still want equality in Church bureaucracy.

Mormon sociologist Marie Cornwall’s 1994 article “The Institutional Role of Mormon Women” (reprinted in 2001) reflects on Church bureaucracy. She shows how women contribute greatly to the day-to-day activities of the Church and that they are “fundamental to the vitality of Mormonism” (Cornwall, 2001 [1994]:262). She points out, however, that despite this fact, the hierarchical structure of the Church and its constraining gender roles restrict women from fully contributing. As such LDS women are left to a “particular sphere” which only “adds to their silence and invisibility” (ibid). Of course this line of thinking is not new. In 1992 Maxine Hanks collected a series of articles addressing inequality in the LDS Church --the publishing of which cost Hanks her church membership. While the Church’s response to accusations of gender inequality was extreme, there does seem to be some softening around the issue.

Recently, with the appearance of the “Ordain Women” movement and the “Let Women Pray” letter writing campaign, the Church does seem to be gaining some sensitivity around issues of gender and the place of women in the Church and in society. In the October 2013 general conference meetings, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, delivered a sermon telling all that there was a place for them in the Church. He assured the global audience that there was room for everyone regardless of personal circumstances and history. He said no one is expected to be perfect and it is okay to have questions. Then, in an unprecedented move, he stated “to be perfectly frank, there have been

times when members or leader in the Church have simply made mistakes. There may have been things said or done that were not in harmony with our values, principles, or doctrine” (Uchtdorf, 2013). For those who had received ecclesial condemnation or even expulsion from the Church for their feminist activities and writings, it was an acknowledgement which was long over-due.

So while the Church still maintains strict gender roles and purports that women’s greatest role is that of wife and mother, it does show a slight shifting in its willingness to acknowledge that the world is changing and the place of women in society may need to be reconsidered more carefully. While I see this as a positive step, my hunch is that gender and familial roles will continue to be entrenched in Church rhetoric and thought—it will be up to the individuals and congregations to continue to expand ideas of family beyond those narrow roles.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed rhetoric of family in society and the LDS Church. I have illustrated how some of the ideas in larger society, such as the family unit is the cornerstone of society, influence ideas about “strong families” even though that term is never clearly defined. For Mormons “The Proclamation” concretizes the relationship between family and society by declaring that families are the fundamental unit of society and asserting that the disintegration of family units will equate to national calamities of biblical proportion.

Further cementing the relationship between family and society is the belief that the family is society’s gatekeeper of morality. Given that morals are often either directly connected to religion, or grow out of religious beliefs, religious values become family values. As the idea of family is entextualized within religious value systems, family becomes part of a religious identity. When the relationship between family and society is grounded in religion, perceived threats to the family unit are seen as serious problems. Social ills are often blamed on changing



structures of family such as fatherless families. Yet, in order to accurately determine if there is a causal relationship between family structure and social problems, we must carefully evaluate family patterns through an historical lens. Considering families in this context allows us to better see shifts as changes in function rather than decline or deterioration of family units. Forces such as modernization, industrialization, marriage and gender rights are seen as threats not only to the family, but to society and Church. Perhaps in an attempt to hedge against these perceived threats, Mormons tend to cling to strict gender roles and models of traditional family units.

Although I have provided some discussion on these topics here, I acknowledge that I have only scratched the surface of these issues here in this chapter. While the scope of this dissertation does not allow for a full consideration of these topics, I propose that this is an area in dire need of further sociological scholarly inquiry.

## Chapter Five: LDS Church: Themes of Family Within the LDS Church

### Hymn #249: Called To Serve<sup>166</sup>

*During my time visiting LDS congregations I went to several adult convert baptisms. They were always very happy occasions attended by ward members and visitors. When I asked one new convert what his thoughts were about his baptism he said it "was not joining a church, it was joining a family."<sup>167</sup>*

*Ward families* are based in the ward; in order to understand what it means to join a *ward family*, we must understand both the ward, and themes of family within the Church. Also, what happens within a ward greatly affects how Mormons consider family and care. In the last chapter I discussed family rhetoric; this chapter illustrates how the LDS Church focuses on family in two main ways—through the doctrine of eternal family (which includes marriage culture, and temple ritual) and through Church programs (ward callings and Church rhetoric). Temple ritual helps anchor ideas of family within the Church, and legitimates certain forms of family. It also provides a template for expanding ideas of family beyond the nuclear family unit. Church programs are established to “strengthen families”<sup>168</sup> and ward callings reinforce ideas of working together and caring for each other like a family would.

This dissertation argues that an ethic of care is constructed by performing rituals of care such as salvific temple rituals for living and deceased family members, home rituals such as family home evening, and ward callings and assignments such as home and visiting teaching. Ward callings are seen as a duty and are structured through the Church’s lay leadership and always include the element of service. Although some sections in this chapter may be reminiscent of previously discussed topics, the goal of this chapter is to add new information

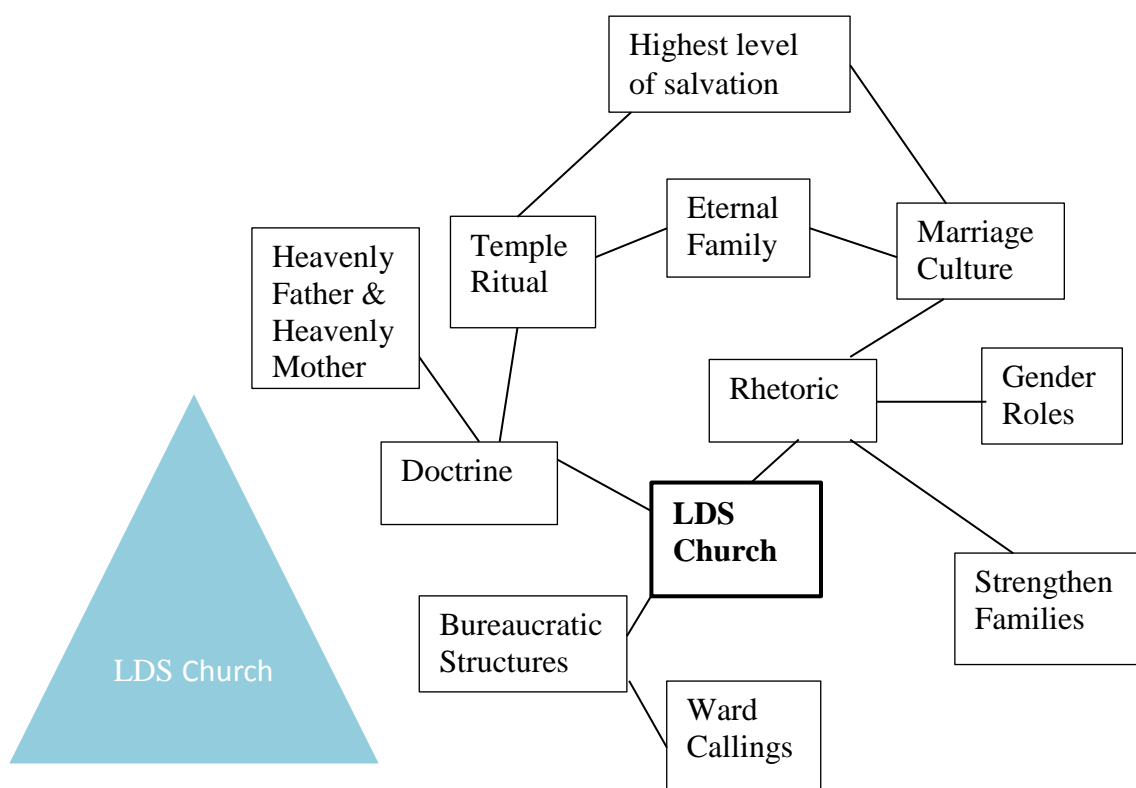
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<sup>166</sup> LDS hymn #249 (CJCLDS, 1985). This is a favorite missionary hymn and is always sung with gusto. I chose this hymn to reflect this chapter due to its focus on duty to serve.

<sup>167</sup> Personal conversation dated November 29, 2009.

<sup>168</sup> This is a very ambiguous phrase that the Church does not clarify, and many of the members I interviewed could not clearly define it either.

onto what we already know about LDS families by taking a closer look at how the Church, as a religious institution, uses doctrine and programs to construct an ideal of family. Adding new information helps form a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973:6) of the symbolic system of family within Mormon religious communities.



### **The LDS Church: Themes of Family within the LDS Church**

Social anthropologist and religious scholar Douglas J. Davies noted in his 2000 work *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace and Glory*, that the LDS culture takes on three identifiable patterns of behavior: domestic (meaning family and home), ward (both geographic area and congregation), and temple. In all three of these patterns there are two significant elements: “the family as an institution of salvation” (Davies, 2000:143), and the act of gaining

merit. Merit is a form of status—status that is developed in connection with religious institutions and in conjunction with the values of society. Within the religious institution of the LDS Church, merit is gained through obedience, by accepting Church doctrine, and by fulfilling Church callings which may include serving a mission. The greatest merit however, can be gained by “being married, in producing a family and seeing them grow up within the life of the church” (161). In the following sections I describe how the LDS Church and its culture are affected by the Church’s focus on family. This adds to the discussions I presented in the previous chapter where I discussed the family as a social unit.

### Eternal Family

Although there has been a shift over the years in the Church’s focus from priesthood to family, from the very beginning Joseph Smith was clearly interested in family unity. Historian Dean L. May noted that Smith’s “First Vision was, in part, a result of anxiety over division within his own family on matters of religion”<sup>169</sup> (2001:67). In his journals, Joseph Smith records his confusion over religious matters and mentions the different directions his family members had taken (Smith, 1978 vol. 1:3). Smith’s anxiety over these issues and their connection to religion only increased over time.

Several scholars have commented on how the death of his brother Alvin, and other family members, affected Joseph Smith’s approach to theology, church, and family (Davies, 2000:84-90; Brown, 2012; Brodie, 1995 [1971]:27-28). As mentioned in chapter three, Smith was greatly troubled by the fact that Alvin had not been baptized prior to his death (Brodie, 1995 [1971]:27-28, Bowman, 2012:15). While Alvin’s death may have affected Smith the most, other deaths also

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<sup>169</sup> “First Vision” is what Mormons call the event of 1820 wherein Joseph Smith had his first vision of God. The event was not recorded until many years later in 1832, after the Book of Mormon had been written and published (Bowman, 2012:12-13).

weighed heavy on Smith's mind. Before Smith reached Nauvoo in 1839, another twelve family members, including four of his own children died. With this in mind, it is understandable then that Smith became increasingly preoccupied with family structure and family relationships and the possibility that religion could somehow knit families together in a way that would keep them from being continually unraveled by death.

Beginning in his early days in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith developed theology and ritual that reflected this preoccupation (May, 2001:67). Bushman stated that among Smith's doctrinal developments, the most striking was "the new emphasis on family. Binding families together, as if their existence too was in jeopardy if not sealed by God's power, underlay both baptism for the dead and plural marriage" (Bushman, 2005:421). One can only speculate that if Smith had not been killed so early in his religious career, his focus on family would have continued and held equal footing with his intention of restoring the priesthood. Through whatever turn of events however, whether it was Smith's death and the rise of Brigham Young to position of Prophet and Church leader, or circumstances of the time, it took many decades before family was once again the focus of the church.

I propose that next to Joseph Smith, the Church's fifteenth, and recent (1995-2008), president, Gordon B. Hinckley had the greatest influence on the social and religious construction of family with the LDS church.<sup>170</sup> Two aspects of his presidency are key: Hinckley's authoring "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" in 1995, and his exuberant temple building program, to support this claim.

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<sup>170</sup> Hinckley served as the LDS Church president and prophet from 1995 to 2008. He was the Church's oldest president being 84 years old when he took the office, and 97 when he died. See LDS.org <http://www.lds.org/churchhistory/presidents/controllers/potcController.jsp?leader=15&topic=facts> accessed August 13, 2013.

Gordon B. Hinckley was installed as the fifteenth president of the LDS Church on March 12, 1995. Just six months later, during the General Relief Society meeting, he officially issued “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” The LDS Church history textbook used at BYU states that Hinckley wrote “The Proclamation” because he was “concerned about the disintegration of families in the modern era” (CJCLDS, 2003 [1989]:631).<sup>171</sup> The textbook cites another Church official, Elder Henry B. Eyring, as saying that “The Proclamation” helped “us as a Church understand the importance our Heavenly Father places upon the family” (ibid.). The historical account states that at the time “The Proclamation” was written, society in general was questioning formal marriage commitment and that worldwide, moral standards were eroding. Hinckley was so convinced that measures needed to be taken to protect and strengthen the home and families, that he met with President Bill Clinton on November, 13, 1996 in order to give him a copy of “The Proclamation” and to “counsel” him that if he wanted to “fix the nation” he would have to “start by fixing families” (CJCLDS, 2003 [1989]:632). Mormons themselves took the words of “The Proclamation” to heart and many hung framed copies of the document in their living rooms. It is still very common to see this framed text prominently displayed in Mormons’ homes, and Sunday school classes still encourage Mormons to memorize Hinckley’s treatise. While the explanation just given for the emergence of “The Proclamation” is the standard LDS textbook explanation, there is another way to consider that document’s appearance, and that is to look at tensions within the Church membership.

“The Proclamation” could be seen as backlash to the 1980s push for women and gay rights as well as Clinton’s 1996 “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy permitting gays to serve in the military. Perhaps more compelling however, could be the pressure coming from within--Mormon

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<sup>171</sup> All BYU students are required to take 14 credit hours of LDS Religion (called “institute”) classes. Students must take course studying the Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants, The New Testament, and electives which usually include Church history. See <http://religion.byu.edu/religion-requirements>.

scholars openly questioning and confronting Church policy and Church doctrine. The early 1990s saw several publications of highly controversial works. Paul and Margaret Toscano's 1990 work, *Strangers in Paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology*, tackles the LDS patriarchy, monogamy and polygamy, and the implications of male and female godhead. The collection of essays in Maxine Hank's 1992 edited volume *Women and Authority: Re-Emerging Mormon Feminism*, which all addressed issues of gender discrimination within Church hierarchy. And David Knowlton's 1992 essay "On Mormon Masculinity" questioned the construction of gender and sexuality in a Church which bases salvation and exaltation on heteronormative marriage. These are some of the more notable works and scholars which confronted issues of gendered roles within the Church and the implications those roles had on the lived experience of Mormonism. Those writings made the Church uncomfortable enough that many of those scholars lost their Church membership or Church based jobs (e.g. BYU teaching position). Simply silencing scholars was not enough however, their works had been published and the Church may have felt pushed to publish something of their own that unquestionably laid out the Church's stance on gender and sexuality. Looking at the timing of the publication of "The Proclamation" in that sense then, it could be seen as a response to insider tension as well as cultural tension. Given that it was issued by the Church president and the council of the twelve apostles, a majority of Mormons revere "The Proclamation" as scripture, and feel it is above reproach. The document solidified both the Church's position on gender and sexuality, further entrenching both within its soteriology, and established Hinckley's position as the new Church authority. Hinckley's efforts are an excellent example of what Armand Mauss calls "official retrenchment" (1994:123). Retrenchment refers to the efforts made by the Church to retain or regain control of the Church (Mauss 1994).

Closely related to “The Proclamation” was Hinckley’s focus on the Church’s explosive temple building program. He also revised the Church’s welfare plan to better address the needs of local needy families as well as worldwide humanitarian aid (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:523). “The Proclamation” and robust temple building activity are linked because living up to the admonishments of “The Proclamation” would not be possible without temple ritual, and since only 47 (8 of which were in Utah) temples were available worldwide in 1995 (compared to 141 in 2013) the need for more temples was apparent. While temple ritual is not performed by all LDS members, temple ritual and the doctrine of marriage and family as eternal relationships governs the Mormon view of family (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:390-91). In other words, the temple is at the heart of Mormonism, and it sanctifies the LDS culture of marriage.

If the Church was going to put increased emphasis on the importance of temple ritual designed to unite families eternally, families had to have access to temples. And, since Mormonism had become a global religion, these temple building efforts had to be global as well. One could speculate that an increased interest in global temples raised awareness of other global family needs which prompted a more concerted effort towards worldwide humanitarian aid.<sup>172</sup> Still, at their core, for many Mormons temples represent marriage and the temporal point where the divine and the family unite.

### **Marriage culture**

*Field notes: Part of my observational habit, as a researcher in the field, is to take a good look at the vehicles in the parking lot as I walk in and out of the church building. One May morning as I was making my usual mental note of how full the parking lot was, and observing the general type and condition of the vehicles, I spotted a pickup truck parked on the back row. It immediately caught my attention with the phrase “Just Married!” painted across the back window in big bold letters. I stopped and looked again and smiled as I considered how this truck is the perfect reflection on the depth of the marriage culture within Mormonism, and especially highlighted the focus of marriage in Utah. It was not uncommon for couples new to the congregation to*

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<sup>172</sup> Issues of humanitarian aid will be discussed in chapter seven.



*announce that they had moved into an apartment during the week having just been married the week before. But, since Utah had been experiencing a rather wet spring, and the painted letters showed no sign of fading or being water damaged, I assumed that this couple had been married within the last week. I felt that to have such a newly married couple attending church so soon after having just been married showed a deep commitment to church. Driving the truck that proclaimed their newlywed status may have been a show of pride in their new status<sup>173</sup>.*

Today, marriage for Mormons often means making eternal commitments to each other in a temple rite of sealing rather than the standard lifetime commitments of secular marriage. Not all Mormons are married in the temple; temple ritual is reserved for only the most orthodox Mormons who meet specific requirements and receive a temple recommend. Although the Church does not release statistics regarding the percentage of Mormons who hold temple recommends, sociologist Heaton has extrapolated figures to reveal that about 45 percent of Mormons in Utah are married in the temple while that number drops to less than 2 percent in Mexico and Central America (1998:124). So worldwide, the number of people holding temple recommends varies greatly. It would be a mistake to assume however, that lower rates of temple recommend holders equates to lower orthodoxy in members (lower rate of observing codes of conduct such as observing the Word of Wisdom, paying a full tithe, etc. which are necessary in order to obtain a temple recommend). Since there are so many temples in Utah, physical travel to visit a temple is not as arduous as it is in places like countries in Africa where there are currently only three temples in the entire continent. Perhaps it is the case that Mormons outside of Utah are less likely to get temple recommends simply because they do not have a temple in their area.

Weddings that take place inside the temple are often referred to as a “celestial marriage” or “covenant marriage” reflecting the soteriological nature of the ritual.<sup>174</sup> Mormons believe that only married men who hold the priesthood, and only women who are married to priesthood

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<sup>173</sup> Field notes May, 2012.

<sup>174</sup> I will discuss temple ritual in more detail in chapter five.

holders, will attain the highest level of heaven.<sup>175</sup> In this sense, both the man and the woman hold the key to the other's eternal glory (Davies, 2000:146). As historian Douglas J. Davies noted, in Mormonism marriage takes on an unusual place of prominence.

Mormons describe the higher realm of salvation open to married Church members as a state of exaltation. Unmarried Mormons, alongside people of goodwill from other denominations, will be granted their own 'degree of glory' in lower heavens, each gaining the benefit appropriate to their own endeavor. But to perceive oneself in that lower state knowing that a higher could have been achieved, might, itself, be to know damnation (2000:3).

This prominence adds significant importance to marriage by establishing the individual's salvific identity as either married and exalted, or single with a lesser degree of glory--marriage and family are equated with God and the divine.

Symbolically speaking, LDS celestial rooms (within the temples) reflect a domestic scene; most resemble elegant American style living rooms rather than the religious chapels or cathedrals one might expect. Davies described the celestial room as a "high quality sitting room or salon rather than as a sanctuary of adoration of God. The Celestial Room, and all that will have gone before it in the endowment rooms and the sealing rooms, marks the human family that is on the path to godhood" (2000:155). Davies is making a reference to the LDS belief that Mormons who obtain the highest glory of heaven, the celestial kingdom, are candidates for godhood. It is the belief that just as God was once a human, humans can become Gods.<sup>176</sup>

Marriage is often assumed to be the logical beginning to families – especially in Mormonism where pre-marital sex is highly discouraged, even forbidden. Marriage marks the beginning of sexual activity, and the resulting family; it also marks the entry into existing kinship

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<sup>175</sup> When I have asked LDS missionaries what happens to single Mormons, I have been told that God will take care of it, that they can still get married in heaven to other singles that did not get the chance to be married on earth. While this answers the initial question, it still emphasizes the necessity of marriage in order to live in the presence of God in the afterlife

<sup>176</sup> This is the point where Mormons as "god-makers" enters. I will not go into the theological underpinnings here, suffice it to say that Mormons believe in eternal progress. The fifth LDS Church president, Lorenzo Snow taught that "as man now is, God once was; as God is now man may be" (Williams, 1984:1).

networks. Finally, not being married is tantamount to being a second class Mormon. Linking marriage to the highest level of salvation is indeed a strong sanction, but not one everyone can comply with.

A Sacrament meeting talk given in church in August, 2013 in the Salt Lake ward addressed how some single Mormons are often ostracized.<sup>177</sup> The talk was given by a middle-aged single woman who stressed the importance of not harshly judging those in the congregation that are single.<sup>178</sup> She referred to several bible stories that highlighted acts of love and acceptance regardless of a person's station in life. In a day and age where some Protestant churches are asking their congregations not to negatively judge those who are in homosexual marriages, whether they are in their congregations or not, the LDS Church is still working on accepting those in their midst who are single. In table 5.1 below are the findings of the 2009 Pew Survey "A Portrait of Mormons in the U.S."

	<b>% Mormons</b>	<b>% General Population</b>
<b>Married</b>	71	54
<b>Living with partner</b>	3	6
<b>Divorced or separated</b>	9	12
<b>Widowed</b>	5	8
<b>Never married</b>	12	19

Table 5.1 (Pew, 2009).

The Mormon proclivity toward marriage is well-known, and often shows up in pop culture and various forms of media. In the September 1995 pilot episode of the short-lived NBC television sitcom "The Single Guy," Jonathan (the single man played by Jonathan Silverman)

<sup>177</sup> Mormons refer to the sermons given by congregations members over the pulpit during Sacrament Meeting as "talks." In recent years the official LDS church website, [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org), has started referring to all conference "talks" as "sermons." This subtle change in language, using a term that is more widely recognized by most Christians, may point to the church's efforts of becoming more mainstream and more broadly accessible.

<sup>178</sup> For more information on the social stigmas Mormon singles experience see "The Social and Cultural Construction of Singlehood among Young, Single Mormons" (Darrington, Piercy and Niehuis, 2005).

quips to his married friends, "you married people have this bizarre need to turn everyone else into married people. You're like vampires — or Mormons" (Hall, 1995)!

Of course, Mormons are not the only group that values marriage; Americans in general feel that marriage and having a family has value (Bellah, et al., 2008 [1985]:110). Marriage has been seen not only as desirable, but morally necessary. A group of sociologists including Robert Bellah reported that around the mid-1900s the majority of Americans believed it was "'sick,' 'neurotic,' or 'immoral' to remain unmarried" but by the late 1970s, only 15% of Americans felt that way (Bellah et al. 2008 [1985]:110). Now most Americans see that getting married, having children, staying married are matters of choice rather than a given (ibid).

As reflected in the field note above, for Mormons, singlehood is still seen as socially, morally, and theologically suspect and devalued. It should be noted that although my field notes indicate that it was a woman speaking in church about issues of singlehood, men experience social rejection and judging just as women do. One man told me that men experience a great amount of pressure to marry and fill the roles of father, husband, and priesthood holder. Young men returning from missions are especially encouraged to marry and start a family as soon as possible, lest they stray. This fear of possible immoral behavior may be behind the fact that LDS men are teased about becoming a "menace to society" (Brough, 2004) should they remain single past the age of 25. The one big difference for single LDS men and women is that LDS men retain an individual identity as a priesthood holder while identity for women is always tied to another as either wife or mother (and preferably both). Within the Mormon culture, there is much more at stake for single Mormon women, than men.

The LDS preference for marriage stems from doctrine and religious affiliation as much as culture. As mentioned in the introduction, Mormons not only believe strongly in the value and

soteriological elements of marriage, they tend to be married. “In comparison with Catholics, Protestants, and persons with no religious preference, Mormons have a higher percentage of persons over age 30 who have ever married than any other religious group” (Heaton, 1988:110). Mormon historian Richard Poll’s 2001 study “Utah and the Mormons” found that the marriage rate among Mormons is about 10% higher than the national average yet the divorce rate is about the same (Poll, 2001:174). And a 2012 Pew report “Mormons in America: Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society,” found that two-thirds, or 67%, of Mormon adults are married, compared to 52% of the general public (Pew, 2012a).

As mentioned, according to LDS doctrine “only those who have a marriage performed in a Mormon temple are candidates for the greatest rewards in the hereafter” (Heaton, Goodman, & Holman, 2001 [1994]:88). Despite this focus on the importance of temple marriage, the percentage of Mormons engaging in temple marriages varies greatly. As reported earlier, statistics show that about 45% of Mormons in Utah are married in the temple while that number drops to less than 2% in Mexico and Central America (Heaton, 1998:124). I am using the three areas: Utah, Mexico and Central America for comparison because these areas have the largest concentrations of LDS temples in the world.<sup>179</sup>

Comparing percentages of temples, Mormons, and temple marriages worldwide paints an interesting picture. Although Utah is relatively small compared to Mexico, (Utah has about 85,000 square miles and Mexico covers nearly 2 million square miles) both have about the same percentage of LDS temples. Utah has 10% of the temples worldwide and Mexico has 13%. Membership numbers are also similar. 13% of all Mormons live in Utah, and 9% live in Mexico. Although the geographical size of each area is radically different, it is important to note that temples are built in areas that have the highest percentages of local members in order to allow as

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<sup>179</sup> See <http://www.lds.org/church/temples/find-a-temple?lang=eng> accessed February 16, 2014.

many Mormons as possible the best access to temples. So, while we cannot assume a direct correlation, we can safely estimate that each temple in each geographic area is meant to support about the same number of Mormons. Given those statistics it is remarkable to review Heaton's report: 45% of Mormons in Utah are married in the temple compared to less than 2% in Mexico. The graph below reflects the comparisons between membership numbers, number of temples, and percentage of temple marriages.

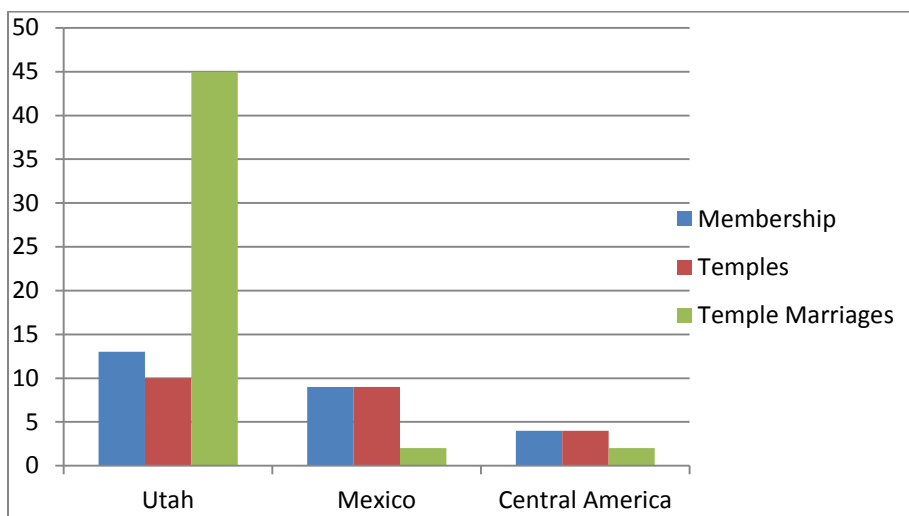


Figure 5.1 Worldwide percentages of Mormons, temples, and temple marriages by area (CJCLDS, 2013f).

These figures support sociologists Rick Phillips and Ryan Cragun's latest report "Contemporary Mormon Religiosity and the Legacy of "Gathering" (2013) which showed that Utah Mormons exhibit higher levels of religious participation than those living elsewhere. Phillips and Cragun suggested that the high density of Mormons in Utah fosters marriage within the faith and "has a perpetual, reciprocal association with family ties in the church" (85). These family ties expand into significant kin networks in the area which means that extended family members are likely to participate in church activities such as age-graded rites of passage (such as baptism, confirmation of priesthood, marriage, and baby blessings). Therefore, Phillips and Cragun concluded that, for Utah Mormons, "family ties promote church activity" and bolster the

blending of religious and family obligations (84). Billingsley and Caldwell found similar results in Black churches where the christening of children “becomes at least a three-generation affair which augmented family members are invited to take part” (1991:437).

A 2012 Pew Report survey confirmed that “family life is very important to most Mormons. Four out of five Mormons (81%) believe that being a good parent is one of the most important goals in life, and roughly three out of four Mormons (73%) put having a successful marriage in this category. This puts family concerns significantly above career concerns, having free time and even living a very religious life as priorities for the Mormons” (Pew, 2012b:5). While I agree with Pew’s findings in general, I think they have missed an important religious element in the Mormon approach to marriage; I find that for most Mormons, having a successful marriage is living a religious life—the two are not separate categories. It would be correct to assume that those with temple recommends, who were married in the temple, and attend temple regularly would say that they live a religious life, yet there are others who are not married, and have a temple recommend who feel that they are living a less religious life than their married counterparts. I suspect that this feeling comes from the fact that single Mormons feel left out in many ways, and so see themselves as less religious. This was bore out in some of my conversations with single Mormons who said they did not always participate in Church because they felt they did not fit in.

In a casual conversation a young single returned missionary<sup>180</sup> told me “there are just certain aspects of the gospel, like ‘The Proclamation’ that I just never paid much attention to, mostly because I didn’t have a family. While I thought it was interesting, it made me feel like a stranger in a strange land. When your religion goes so crazy about family, you just get left

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<sup>180</sup> “Returned missionary” is the phrase Mormons use to refer to someone who has successfully completed an LDS mission and who has returned home from the mission field.

out.”<sup>181</sup> A young single BYU co-ed commented that “for other women like me who are not married and have not family, there aren’t as many reasons for us to be fully committed like those with a husband and kids. There just isn’t a lot to keep is in the Church.”<sup>182</sup>

This combination of marriage and religion is most clearly reflected in “The Proclamation” (CJCLDS, 1995). “The Proclamation” provides a gender specific and heteronormative definition of marriage and claims it is so by divine authority. In this context marriage becomes not only religious, but religious by LDS standards since it was issued by LDS authorities, and so is divinely ordained and above temporal matters. Anthropologist Melvyn Hammarberg pointed out that the Church’s failure to distinguish between civil and temple marriages within “The Proclamation” forces marriage to be heterosexual and provides a basis for religious opposition to same-sex civil marriage (2008:209). In talking with Mormons I found a deep concern that legislation allowing for same sex marriage will force churches, including the LDS Church, to perform those marriages. I think this concern stems from the fact that Mormons conflate marriage with religion, i.e. they do not see it as a civil rite--in orthodox Mormonism the two are inseparable.<sup>183</sup>

In addition to “The Proclamation,” a good example of the connectedness of marriage to God and religion can be found in one particular lesson given within the LDS adult Sunday school lessons and the young men and young women’s classes (CJCLDS, 1994). This means that everyone over age twelve hears this lesson at least once during the year.<sup>184</sup> That lesson is about

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<sup>181</sup> Personal interview conducted August 28, 2012.

<sup>182</sup> Personal conversation dated July 31, 2013.

<sup>183</sup> Of course Mormons are not the only religious group to link marriage and religion. A full discussion of how other religious groups conflate marriage and religion is outside the scope of this project.

<sup>184</sup> Since I only attended the adult classes I do not know how often the “sacred triangle” is referred to throughout the year aside from the once per year as scheduled in the lesson manuals in the young adult classes. I do know, however, that the “sacred triangle” metaphor is used several times throughout the year in Relief Society and Sunday School classes in addition to the annually scheduled lesson. At least once during my time with the Mormons this lesson was given in a special combined session bringing the Priesthood and Relief Society members together.



the “sacred triangle” which includes God, husband, and wife (see fig. 5.2). The instructors always use the analogy of a three-legged stool and emphasize how taking away one of the legs would cause the stool to topple and become useless. Of course the point of the lesson is to highlight the connectedness of God, husband, and wife, but it is also always pointed out that as the couple move in unison toward God, the distance between husband and wife grows closer together as well.

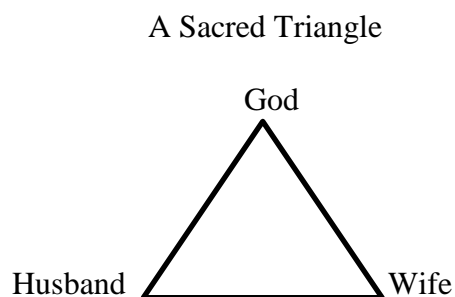


Figure 5.2 Sacred Triangle (CJCLDS, 1994)

Such conflation of God and marriage is not exclusive to Mormonism. Religious historian Mircea Eliade writes of sacred ancestors and states that in religious thinking “marriage is valorized as a hierogamy of heaven and earth” (Eliade, 1957:165). This thought helps make the sanctification of life, and life experiences such as marriage, possible. Tying heaven (god) to the profane (human), and the human experience of sexual union within marriage, transfigures the profane into the sacred (Eliade, 1957). Within Mormonism, the transfiguration from the profane into the sacred involves both home and temple ritual.

### **Home Ritual**

“The family that prays together stays together” is a popular aphorism that many Mormons take to heart and actually practice as a daily home ritual. While LDS Sunday services are not heavily laden with obvious ritual as other religious traditions may be, LDS homes often

are. Generally speaking, Mormons are not unique in this matter. Whether it is something as simple as saying grace before a family meal, or the more complicated practice of maintaining a Japanese family home altar (Kawano, 2005), home ritual is an important part of religious life.

Performing and observing ritual is a way of gaining and transmitting knowledge (Jennings, 1996:325-26). Religious scholar and educator Janet Fishburn (1991) noted that home ritual is especially important in this regard as it plays an important role in religious instruction. As an example, Fishburn stated that within the Christian faith children learn to participate in worship through home ritual. This is certainly the case within Mormonism through the Church established ritual of Family Home Evening (FHE).

FHE is a family meeting held once a week, usually on Monday in LDS homes (I will return to discuss this home ritual in more depth below). Scripture study is an important element in LDS home ritual. One young married man told me that he felt home ritual helped bring families closer together. He told me: “I just think, everything you are taught in church is strengthens your family. All the commandments, all the callings, it all helps bring family closer. Family scripture study, prayer, home evening, I mean it’s all there to strengthen your family and we definitely see that in our families.”<sup>185</sup>

The LDS focus on home ritual may stem, in part, from the fact that the Church relies exclusively on lay leaders rather than pastors for scriptural exegesis. Those who educate professional clergy acknowledge that pastors are known for their gifts at preaching and leading worship. Religious educators such as Fishburn believe that in order to hone these skills, “every pastor should be able to devote at least one full uninterrupted day a week to Bible study and sermon preparation” (Fishburn, 1991:66). Within the LDS Church structure of lay leadership every member is not only a potential leader, but also someone who could be asked to deliver a

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<sup>185</sup> Personal interview conducted June 24, 2012.

Sunday sermon (Leone, 1979:168). Most Mormons have some type of calling where these skills are required. Theoretically then, all Mormons need to spend time with Bible study preparing themselves to be preacher, teacher, exegete, etc. Home ritual such as family scripture reading helps support this need.

In many religious traditions, home ritual engages children with stories that convey important doctrinal and cultural instruction. Within the Jewish tradition, children learn ritual through hearing stories of faith associated with home rituals (Fishburn, 1991:76). For instance during Sukkot (the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles), temporary huts are erected where families eat their evening meals and often even sleep during the week-long holiday. Children make decorations for these huts and hear stories of how their ancestors lived in similar temporary dwellings as they trekked through the desert. During this festival children learn the ritual of shaking the *lulav* (palm branch) and *etrog* (lemon-like citron) together symbolizing the backbone and heart of the Jewish people (Dosick, 1995:147).

Within Judaism, home rituals such as the weekly lighting of the Shabbat candles, have always played an important part in the Jewish household. Shabbat is a time set aside each week “that permits each Jew to connect with God, with family, with community, with self” (Dosick, 1995:127). Similarly, in Mormon homes, rituals such as daily prayer, scripture study, and weekly Family Home Evening (discussed in depth below) insures that the family spends time together on a regular basis. According to figures stated by Luke Perry and Christopher Cronin, 51% of Mormons stated that “it was essential to conduct the regular family home evening” (2012:46) as part of being a good Mormon.

Fishburn speculated that the habit of establishing Jewish home rituals may have been important elements within early Christianity. She believes that for Christians, the practice of

home ritual may have begun when they were no longer welcome to worship in the synagogues (Fishburn, 1991:78). While Mormons have not been pushed outside of their meeting houses and temples as places of worship, the home may still be a place where many Mormons worship. And, as historian Davies pointed out, the Celestial Room, the most significant room in LDS temples resembles a “splendid family room” (2000:75). Indeed the temple is where family togetherness is the goal. LDS homes are not different in the goal of bringing families together. I found that especially in Jewish and Mormon families, home ritual is focused just as much on family togetherness as on Church doctrine.

Researchers at BYU assert a direct connection between what they label as “strong families” and the time that such families spend together engaged in home ritual (Loser, et al., 2009). Within the LDS Church, home ritual, like most other aspects of Mormonism, contains the element of duty. Religious duties are given to family activities and specific rituals and are recommended by Church leaders. Such rituals include the father’s blessings, daily scripture readings, daily family prayer, and family home evening.

Family Home Evening (FHE) is a home religious service with a format similar to a church meeting. These services include an opening hymn and prayer, a lesson, an activity, a closing hymn and a closing prayer. First introduced in 1915 “Home Evening” was set up to be a time when families could gather in their homes to teach the children the “word of the Lord” and “the needs and requirements of their families” (Church Education System, 1989:486). Regarding the importance of FHE, David O. McKay is often quoted as saying “no other success can compensate for failure in the home” (Church Educational System, 1989:565). This focus on the home and the blending of family success and religious success and a strong society is an

important structuring element within Mormonism, and one that has been in place since the early 1900s.

The turn of the century was a volatile time for the Church. The Church was heavily in debt and many young families were leaving Utah after becoming discouraged with poor agricultural prospects (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:453-54). I speculate that the establishment of Home Evening was an attempt by the Church to reinforce its early Mormons settlements and keep families in Utah by tying family to Church more closely, and bringing Church into the home. It may also be the case that by bringing Church into the home the family would remain Mormon regardless of whether the home was in Utah or elsewhere. In that sense, Armand Mauss suggested that FHE was established to reinforce Mormon ways and Mormonism as a subculture (1994:71).

Formally introduced in 1965 as a Church program that all families should participate in, the church leaders emphasized the practice of FHE as weekly family gatherings (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:599). Manuals, which the church published and distributed, were used by LDS families worldwide for weekly lessons during these weekly family meetings. These lessons focused on the everyday application of gospel principles that were being presented in priesthood and auxiliary classes, and suggested family activities (Church Educational System, 1989:564-5). The preface to the first FHE manual contained a message from then church President David O. McKay which stated: “The problems of these difficult times cannot better be solved in any other place, by any other agency, by any other means, than by love and righteousness, and precept and example, and devotion to duty in the home” (Church Educational System, 1989:565). The current *Family Home Evening Resource Book* available on-line at LDS.org still echoes this thought, previous church President Spencer W. Kimball states: “we continue to stress the urgent

need for couples, for parents and children, and for single adults living alone to study and live the principles of truth, with special attention to nurturing love and harmony within their family circles” (CJCLDS, 1997:235).<sup>186</sup>

During my time in both New Jersey and Utah I was invited to attend special Family Home Evening groups for single adults. In New Jersey a large portion of the group included the single women (in their early twenties) who were working as nannies for families in the ward, and the missionaries serving in the area who often brought investigators (potential converts). There were usually somewhere between seven to twelve people who attended and the missionaries were the ones to organize and lead the meeting. The format followed the same guidelines as those set for families—opening prayer, hymn, lesson, activity, closing hymn and closing prayer. Meetings were always held in the home of a couple in the congregation who acted as host and hostess. Even though the young nannies sat with the families they worked for during Sacrament meeting on Sunday, they attended special FHE groups for single adults rather than staying with their families. One of the biggest reasons for these special FHE groups was to give young singles in the area a chance to spend time with their peers.

In Utah I attended a group that was specifically for single older women. Most of those attending this FHE group were middle-aged although there were times when younger women attended also. These meetings were always held in the home of the woman who first formed the group and she often invited other friends or investigators who lived outside of the ward boundaries. This was a smaller group than the one in New Jersey with an average attendance of five. Like New Jersey, this group also followed the set format of prayer, hymn, lesson, closing hymn and closing prayer. In both the Utah and New Jersey special FHE groups I noticed that it

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<sup>186</sup> Family Home Evening Guidebook retrieved on January 26, 2012 from <https://www.lds.org/manual/family-home-evening-resource-book?lang=eng>.

created a space for members who did not have families with which to observe this home ritual, an opportunity to participate in community and Church and find meaning in their situation of being without a family of their own.

Peter Berger wrote that “as long as the individual can indeed find meaning and identity in his private life he can manage to put up with the meaningless and dis-identifying world of the megastructures” (1977:134). Here, as with the LDS President’s quote, private life is equated to home, but Berger also includes church and neighborhood as possible mediating institutions that provide a “measure of stability to private life” (ibid). Sociologist Michael Palmer would agree. Palmer suggested that home ritual helps Mormons think of the family as a church unit. He stated that by sanctioning ritual such as FHE, the Church offers families a way of symbolizing the sacred status the Church places on the family unit (Palmer, 1982:184-85). Palmer seems to be stating that the symbiotic relationship between church and family is, in part, facilitated by home ritual—I would agree.

One could say that through exercising home rituals such as FHE, home structure mirrors LDS Church structure. Examining these mirroring relationships is a topic that anthropologist Mary Douglas (1982) and sociologist James Spickard (1988) have devoted their work to. Their work suggests that cosmology, family type, and the religious attribute of home ritual are deeply connected (Spickard, 1988:337). For instance, in hierarchical family types, cosmology parallels society (ibid). In the case of Mormonism this is evident in the gendered familial roles of mother as nurturer and father as head of house and Church (bishop as father figure) and mirrored in the doctrine of a heavenly mother and heavenly father. Bringing Church into the home through home ritual such as FHE further cements the mirrored relationship of family and Church.

Social, familial, and religious patriarchalism are enhanced through ritual (Spickard, 1988:328-30), and in the case of Mormonism, important healing rituals take place in the home. These rituals are most often performed by the father in the home (male priesthood holder) but can also include other elders in the ward. These elders anoint the sick with consecrated oil and recite a special prayer/blessing as they lay their hands upon the head of the afflicted. The anointing and blessing of the sick within the home transforms the profane space of the everyday (home) into the sacred space of Church when God is called upon to enter that space and heal the sick. The use of objects such as consecrated oil, and actions, the laying on of hands, help unite the ritual's participants in faith, and belief. This binds them more closely together as a social group.

Receiving or offering healing blessings was something that several of those I interviewed mentioned as something that made them feel valued in the ward and in their families. The men I interviewed felt valued in their ward (both congregation and geographic area) when they were asked to give a healing blessing to a member of the congregation or someone who was an inactive member living in the ward. One man told me "never did I ever think, growing up, that I would be giving so many people so many blessings. Last night someone called me because someone in the ward got beaten up and was in the hospital and we (he and another man) went to give him a blessing late last night."<sup>187</sup> For single Mormon women not having a husband means not having a priesthood holder in the home that can offer healing blessings. One woman told me that she has an older son she can call who can come over and give her a blessing, but she also mentioned that she really appreciates having other men in the ward who live closer to her that she can call for blessings as well. Another woman told me she depended on men in the congregation for a house blessing when she moved into the area. "Like when I moved into the

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<sup>187</sup> Personal interview conducted February 15, 2013.



new apartment they blessed my home, and it really made a difference in the spirit of the home for your family; having a priesthood blessing.”<sup>188</sup> She went on to say that while it was easy to build friendships with other women in the congregation, building relationships with the men was more difficult, and often even rare. Being able to call on the men in the congregation for blessings offered not only a needed service for her, but also a chance at building relationships. She said that in addition to the blessings she often appreciated the personal connection of getting a hug, or even a handshake from a man. She laughed and told me “I don’t know why we need me, but we do!”<sup>189</sup>

Émile Durkheim concluded that without symbolic representation, social feelings have an unstable existence, that ritual is prior to and gives rise to beliefs (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]:232; Bellah, 2006:151). He named observable actions and collective symbolic representations such as ritual as social facts and found that they revealed information about belief within the collective conscience--all of these elements combine to form Church (1996:192). If we apply that formula to Palmer’s original observation we can flesh it out to illustrate how, through home ritual, the LDS family is one of the elements that combine to form Church. When family is seen as an element of Church, it is easier to see how Mormons directly link perceived threats to the family, as threats to the Church and society.

### **Temple Ritual**

*I first heard about Sarah in Relief Society meeting. The woman who was giving the lesson was talking about her daughter and how special she was to the ward. The woman sitting next to me leaned over and said "Sarah is our miracle baby." When Sarah’s parents discovered they were expecting, they also discovered there were severe problems and the baby was not expected to live. Worse, if the baby did live, it was likely that heart surgery would be needed immediately after birth and mental and physical challenges would be a given. The woman tells me that Sarah did indeed survive both the pregnancy and the postnatal heart surgery and that she was*

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<sup>188</sup> Personal interview conducted July 26, 2012.

<sup>189</sup> Personal interview conducted July 26, 2012.

*developmentally challenged. The woman next to me went on to tell me how Sarah's survival had been a miracle, as well as her slow, but steady progress. "Oh, how we prayed for that little family!" I got the distinct impression that the young couple and their baby had been surrounded by ward members offering prayers, blessings, and assistance.*

*One Sunday Sarah's mother Sherry was giving the Relief Society lesson on the temple and told us the story of how Sarah got her name. Sherry tells how as a young single woman she was doing temple work before she went on her mission. She said that on one particular day she was not doing work for her own ancestors, but just got a name out of the temple's databank. The person she was doing the work for that day was Sarah Emma. Sherry said she truly felt the spiritual presence of the woman she performed the rituals for that day. She said that as she sat in the celestial room at the end of the temple session, she had an overwhelming feeling of gratitude from Sarah and felt a bonding between them - at that moment she decided that her first daughter would be named Sarah Emma.<sup>190</sup>*

LDS temple rituals are performed more often for the dead than they are the living. The temple rituals of baptism for the dead and proxy ordination are performed exclusively for deceased ancestors (and others). For the living, those two rituals are performed in standard LDS meetinghouses. Other temple rituals of endowment and sealing (weddings and binding families together) are performed for both the living and the dead. The first time a Mormon participates in temple rituals he or she does the ritual for him or herself, on other subsequent visits the LDS member is standing in proxy for deceased relatives (or others) (Hammarberg, 2013:188). Those who participate in temple rituals are referred to as temple patrons.

Hammarberg explained that the endowment ritual consists of receiving instruction about the plan of salvation enacted in lectures that reflect LDS doctrine (2013:184). Originally these lectures were delivered by live actors, but now most temples employ film/video presentation for the endowment sessions (188-89). Within the ritual participants receive new names, are given special instructions and symbols, repeat prayers in unison, and finally exhibit symbolic knowledge through an exchange of gestures, and questions and answers as they pass through a veil (a curtain symbolizing the veil between heaven and earth) from the endowment room into

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<sup>190</sup> From field notes dated August 4, 2009.

the celestial room (194). Once inside the celestial room the patron is free to sit quietly and reflect on the endowment session or silently pray.

Mormons who hold temple recommends, and perform temple ritual, often view their temple attendance as “one of the purest forms of service they may render in this life” (Givens, 2004:174). It is viewed as service since performing proxy ritual grants essential salvific benefits to those who cannot perform them for themselves. Joseph Smith told early Mormons that looking after their dead in this way was their greatest responsibility in this life—“they without us cannot be made perfect; for it is necessary that the sealing power should be in our hands to seal our children and our dead for the fullness of the dispensation of times” (174). For Mormons, then, salvation becomes a group, rather than an individual, process.

Mormons believe that temple rituals performed on behalf of deceased ancestors provide the unique opportunity for entire extended family units to be transported into God’s presence in the afterlife while other religions offer only individual salvation. When Mormons use the word family they are referring to immediate family, extended family, and eternal family.

Anthropologist Fenella Cannell notes that orthodox Christianity places kinship in the realm of the earthy and natural while “Mormons see eternal kinship as the distinguishing feature of divine status in heaven. Kinship is humanity’s divine destiny” (Cannell, 2005:349). Douglas Davies noted that genealogical work and proxy baptisms help establish the belief that the living gain salvation only by fostering the salvation of their dead (2000:91). In this sense, the individual has an equal responsibility in gaining salvation for himself as well as his family.

The Mormon missionary message is centered on families with an emphasis on temple ritual and what the church can do for families. Historian Jan Shipps states that while individual salvation depends on knowing Christ within the legitimation of LDS priesthood, the “unit of

exaltation' is the family rather than the individual" (1985:149). Sociologist John Jarvis notes that Mormon missionaries present a divine model of family salvation.

They teach that each individual may continue current family relationships in the afterlife and may even link such immediate family networks to those of ancestors, as well as to those of the generations that follow. Such a family-centered cosmology allows Mormons to emphasize from the outset that the most important success human beings can achieve in mortal life is to build strong and loving families on Earth that are based on the divine model (Jarvis, 2000:249).

The ability to insure the salvation of ancestors answered one of the biggest questions within Christianity. During Joseph Smith's time many people were asking what happened to good people if they died without being baptized. Proxy baptism solved this problem-- death was no longer an obstacle for salvation. While this salvific element is crucial to LDS theology, another more subtle element is the need to "insure" that the family unit will survive death as well, particularly when illness and death led to multiple marriages. That extra element is the sealing of families as an eternal unit.

Looking after the salvific needs of other family members through temple ritual, including immediate family and extended kin networks, is a unique aspect of Mormonism. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow states that one way children learn to care for others is by developing the ability to empathize with others (1995:36). He illustrated that when children are cared for, learning to care for others is a natural step. I suggest that for Mormons, learning to care for others outside of kinship networks, as if they were family, is a natural step derived from caring for their own kinship networks. Caring for deceased ancestors through temple ritual develops the ability to care for extended kinship networks. Doing temple ritual for others outside an ancestor group allows Mormons to think of others, and to care for others as if they were part of a capacious family unit, and to establish symbolic links to unrelated Mormons.

Palmer's dissertation on Mormon families discussed temple sealings and baptism for the dead. He stated that the social sphere of the Mormons contained the doctrines for these rituals, which created a vision of a "heavenly sphere where the whole human family would be organized into an eternal chain of individual families" (emphasis is Palmer's) (1982:108). This creates a more literal rather than metaphorical "family of God" where family ties "are projected into the celestial realm" (111).

In the interviews I conducted I found references to the connection Mormons feel to others, even strangers, for whom they perform proxy temple ritual. The snippet of field notes concerning Sarah is one example of how the temple experience becomes very personal for those performing the rituals. Here is another example from my interviews that also illustrates connections people make with those they do temple work for.

*It is August and I visit a single man in the apartment he shares with two other BYU students. The roommates are Korean and have made delicious smelling food that reminds me of the dorms at Drew. I find myself a bit "homesick" as we begin our interview.*

*The young man is polite and engaging and offers to share his thoughts and experiences of LDS temple ritual. He tells me: "the first time that we are baptized, or perform any other ordinances in the temple, we do it for our self, but then after that we do it for other people. But even doing it for other people, there are kind of implicit benefits I think for the people that do that because you remember the promises and the commitments you made and it's a good reminder that way. And plus, it kind of brings you back to the feelings you had when you did those things and just a closeness to God and the divine as you go into the temple and leave everything else behind you".*

*I ask him if he feels a connection with the people he does temple work for. He answers: "Yes! Definitely! I feel a connection to them even though I may not have known them before going into the temple session. When you go in, they'll give you a little paper and it will give the person's name that you will be doing temple work for. It will state where they are from, when they were born, and so it's fun to kind of think about what that person might have been like. And, I feel that the people, or the souls of the people that have passed on, can perhaps see what's going on and I feel kind of this, connection with them. It's really an interesting experience. It's kind of difficult for me to verbalize, but yeah, I do feel a connection with them."*<sup>191</sup>

All temple ritual culminates in the Celestial Room; a room that symbolizes the celestial kingdom (the upper most region of heaven) where the presence of God may be felt (Davies,

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<sup>191</sup> Personal interview conducted August 10, 2012.

2000:76). In ideological terms, the family is nothing less than the framework for salvation” (Davies, 2000:155). As mentioned in the previous chapter, LDS temple celestial rooms more closely resemble domestic American style living rooms rather than religious chapels (Davies, 2000:155, 75). I speculate that this is meant to suggest the closeness of religious life to domestic life. Prior to 1980 however, very few Mormons could attend the temple simply because there were so few temples worldwide, hence, an obvious need to build more temples.

### **Temple Building**

Former LDS Church president Gordon B. Hinckley was the force behind the Church’s explosive temple building program. Prior to 1980 there were only seventeen temples in operation worldwide; six of which were in Utah. By the time Hinckley was installed as president the total number of worldwide temples had grown to only 47 (CJCLDS, 2003 [1989]:640). During the thirteen years Hinckley was president (1995-2008) the Church dedicated (opened for operation) an astounding 82 additional temples. Since his death in 2008 only twelve new temples have been opened. As of August, 2013, there are 141 temples in operation, thirteen under construction, and sixteen that have been announced (Satterfield, 2013).

Church spending on temples is a point of concern for some Mormons I have talked to. There are those Mormons who feel more should be spent on welfare and humanitarian efforts than on temples and other Church endeavors such as the Church owned City Creek Mall in downtown Salt Lake City (which is estimated to have cost hundreds of millions of dollars to complete). At the July 2013 Sunstone symposium at least one person publically declared that she had discontinued paying her tithing in protest of Church spending on the City Creek Mall which meant she was giving up her temple recommend.

Since the LDS Church does not disclose its financial records, finding figures on how much the Church spends erecting temples and how that number measures up against humanitarian aid is next to impossible. One is left searching for the rare news article that gives some hints about the Church's spending. Shortly before the San Diego temple was opened in 1993, *Los Angeles Times* reporter Tony Perry ran an article stating that the cost to build that one temple was \$24 million (1993).

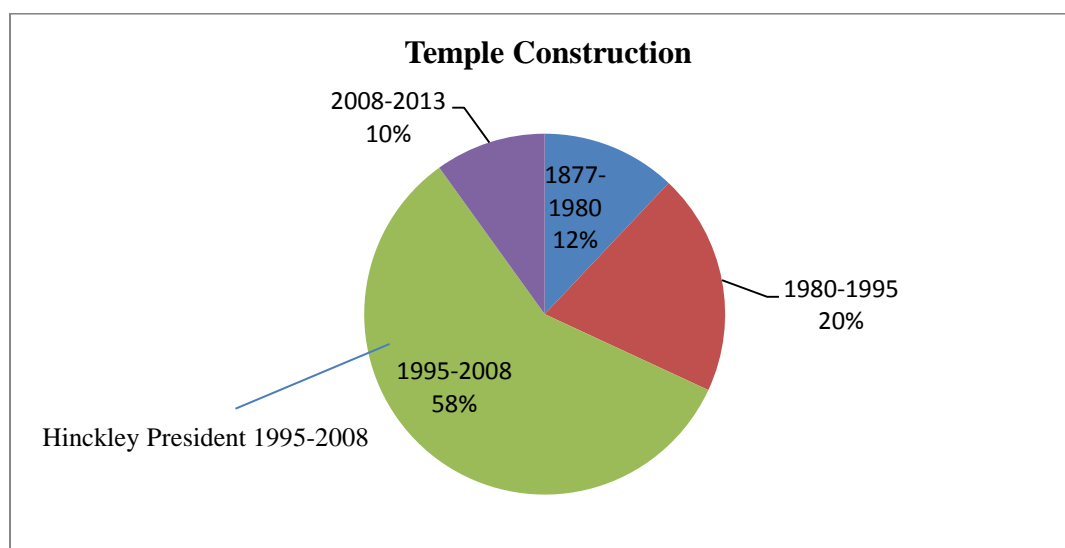


Figure 5.3 Temple Construction

The chart above reflects the boom in temple construction during the years Gordon B. Hinckley was president. While it is intuitive that temples are needed in order to perform temple work (ritual), what is not apparent, are the other types of activities that also drive and support temple construction and use. In addition to ritual that takes place inside the temple, there are other family centered rituals connected to the temple, but which take place outside of the temple, which even non-members can participate in. Those rituals include genealogical research and indexing. I classify doing genealogical research as a ritual due to the symbolic importance placed on it. Indexing is the process of entering names into searchable databases that people can use to find their ancestors. All of the completed indexes (records) are kept in the Granite Mountain

Records Vault in Salt Lake City which contains over 15 billion records (Christensen, 2012).

Ultimately, the goal of indexing is to be able to take family names into the temple so proxy rituals can be performed. Mormons are strongly encouraged to research their own family history documenting names and relationships in family trees. Specifically, members are urged to maintain a four-generation group genealogy sheet (Mauss, 1994:89).

Genealogy is inseparably connected with temple work and is said to help foster a sense of connection “to a unique identity and heritage among members” (ibid). To assist members in this effort the Church has established Family History Centers around the globe and the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah. In the Salt Lake center over four hundred professionals and volunteers assist up to two thousand visitors a day in tracing their “kindred dead” (Givens, 2004:119). In 1999 the Church launched a free website <https://familysearch.org/>. This site gathers and shares genealogical records worldwide. It is connected to 4,500 satellite family history centers, has around the clock expert assistance available and claims to have 3 billion searchable records.<sup>192</sup> According to Mormon religious scholar Terryl Givens, public response to the website has been remarkable. He reports that during the first four years the site received over 10 billion hits. He feels that this Church sponsored service makes it possible for “millions of families—in and outside the church—to reconnect with their ancestors through genealogical research, and has fostered a Mormon mindset that enlarges and enriches the concept of ‘family’ in unprecedented ways” (Givens, 2004:119).

As sociologist Robert Zussman pointed out in his 2012 work *Ancestors and Relatives: Genealogy, Identity, and Community*, as humans we have a tremendous fascination with genealogy (4). He states that although it is by no means a modern phenomenon, today’s

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<sup>192</sup> Family History Centers are usually located within LDS ward buildings, but there are also stand-alone centers, such as the one on Main Street in Park City, Utah.



technology facilitates searching for family roots. Zussman suggests that genealogy has such popularity in today's culture that it may be the second most visited category of websites after pornography (4). Ancestry.com, one of the biggest search sites with about 2.7 million paying subscribers, is headquartered in Provo Utah and has partnered with the LDS Church (Harvey, 2013). Salt Lake Tribune reporter Tom Harvey stated that the two organizations will combine records to bring one billion historical records on-line. This will be a boon to many, including Mormons who are seeking to index (officially record) their ancestors' records.

I have heard Mormons say that doing indexing is a form of unofficial missionary work, yet, I have also found instances where Mormons have been called to serve an official genealogy based "family history mission" (Christensen, 2013). Deseret News reporter Emily Christensen (2013) related the story of a woman convert to the Church who was called to serve a 30-month mission with the International Research team working on her own computer from home assisting others with their genealogy. Christensen's article detailed how the original mission was extended for an additional two years and that the convert serving the mission reported that the experience increased her love for her family-- that it was a heart-warming experience to find her ancestors. In her own congregation, as a family history missionary, she helped the bishop plan activities for the youth and active and non-active members in the ward where they could learn to do their own family history. This effort led to an increase in youth activity, and missionary referrals to eleven less-active families.<sup>193</sup> Christensen's article illustrated ideas that other scholars have suggested, that doing genealogical work fosters family unity. The act of gathering family records teaches children and teenagers the importance of family bonds between living families and deceased kin (Davies, 2000:145).

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<sup>193</sup> This means that the non-active members who came to family history events were interested enough to either ask that the missionaries visit them, or gave the missionaries names of other family members to visit.

Mormons have discovered, however, that they must exercise caution when gathering names and are admonished to keep to their own family trees. The LDS Church has come under fire on more than one occasion for submitting names and doing temple work for Holocaust victims and other Jewish people. On February 29, 2012 the First Presidency issued a letter to all Mormons to be read from the pulpit during sacrament meeting. The letter clearly stated that members are not to submit names or do temple work for people they are not related to and “without exception, Church members *must not* submit for proxy temple ordinances any names from unauthorized groups, such as celebrities and Jewish Holocaust victims. If members do so, they may forfeit their New Family Search privileges.<sup>194</sup> Other corrective action may also be taken” (Monson, Eyring, and Uchtdorf, 2012:3).

Temple work depends on family history records. While doing genealogy is not actual temple ritual, temple ritual relies on gathering names of people to perform proxy ritual for (baptism, and weddings or sealings). Unlike ward callings, where individual members are designated specific jobs for a limited time period, family history work is something all Mormons are expected to do throughout their lifetime. Thomas F. O’Dea’s work on Mormonism reflects on the ways that homage to the early Mormon pioneers helped instill both identity and loyalty within the group (1957:141). I found that is still the case as many Mormons I have talked with express a great interest in compiling family histories which often includes pioneer history, a high status ancestry.

*Connections to ancestors.*

Naturally, there are other religions and cultures for which such ancestral focus is an integral part of both. A good example is pre-modern Japan. Japanese family members included

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<sup>194</sup> “New Family Search privileges” which the Church leaders point to in their letter is access to the Church owned genealogy website <https://new.familysearch.org/>.

living members, dead ancestors and unborn descendants. In that society living members had a moral obligation of showing gratitude to their ancestors and a responsibility to manage and protect family resources for their descendants (Smith, 2000:307).

Another example is the Jewish tradition. Jews are interested in genealogical records in order to trace their religious birthright. According to Jewish law, a Jew is a person born to a Jewish mother or one who has converted to Judaism (although some orthodox Jews do not recognize converts). Technically speaking then, a person born to a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother is not Jewish, even if raised in a Jewish home. Today, Reform Jews consider a child Jewish if either parent is a Jew (Telushkin, 2001 [1991]:482-82). Within the Jewish tradition there is an enduring practice of honoring parents with a special Mourners Kaddish (prayer) when they die. Jewish law mandates a full year of mourning be observed upon the death of a parent. Additionally, acts performed for the dead (such as helping with funeral costs) are called *gemilut khessed*, the Hebrew phrase meaning “acts of loving kindness” (Telushkin, 2001 [1991]:706). Such acts are regarded as “being on the highest moral plane” (ibid).

Mormonism varies from both the Japanese and Jewish examples above. Mormons do not necessarily feel that they have an obligation of showing gratitude to their ancestors. However, I have heard Mormons say that they feel grateful they can serve their ancestors by performing temple rituals for them, and that serving their ancestors brings them blessings. On the other hand Mormons do feel that they have an obligation to perform salvific rites for their own ancestors. Performing these rituals solidifies the connection between family and the institution of salvation (Davies, 2000:143). Because Mormons believe that only those who are sealed to their spouse and family in a temple can attain the highest level of heaven, doing ritual for ancestors becomes an

integral part of an individual's salvation and exaltation--"family becomes the medium of exaltation" (Davies, 2000:143).

As is the case with many religious traditions, there is pride in being able to claim that you are following not just your parents' religious traditions, but grandparents, great-grandparents, even great-great-grandparents and beyond. The pioneer heritage of Mormons and Mormonism is held in high regard. Yet, there is a religious heritage that goes back much farther, as Mormons claim to be literal descendants of Abraham.

Mormons as descendants of Abraham is not a widely discussed topic, but one that helps construct group cohesiveness. As discussed in chapter three, Joseph Smith taught that the LDS Church was a restored church. Smith established the *Book of Mormon* as the recorded history of ancient priesthoods as well as ancient peoples; people who had covenanted with God to bring about salvation. Smith and his followers thought of themselves as the "reconstitution of the house of Israel" and as members of the tribe of Abraham (Shipps, 2001 [1994]:69). Baptism into Mormonism was also adoption into the lineage of Abraham, reinforcing the idea of being God's chosen people with whom God had covenanted. This rhetorical and symbolic system of conversion and adoption, served to create individual Saints as well as an LDS community (70). Therefore, "almost as soon as it became a gathered community, a web of natural kinship started to form within Mormonism" (ibid).

The adoption into the lineage of Abraham was more formal in the early days of Mormonism than it may be today. Confirmation into the LDS priesthood was considered as adoption "welding the Mormons to the family of the patriarchs" (Bowman, 2012:46) of the bible and into the family of Adam, Moses, and Abraham. This need to be welded together as descendants of Abraham may have been one of the factors which led to the practice of

polygamy. Since the priesthood was not conferred upon women, the only way women were “adopted” into the lineage of Abraham was through temple sealings (temple marriage) (Bowman, 2012:83-85).<sup>195</sup> Though often secret, “these marriages were not intended to be private communions but rather links in a great network of relationships that bound Joseph’s people together to him, made them a family, and ensured that their bonds would never fade” (ibid:84).

### Church Programs Strengthen Families

LDS administrative handbooks, which lay out duties and responsibilities of lay leaders, repeatedly states that the various church programs, and the Church itself, is designed to strengthen individuals and families; in one handbook’s 215 pages the word “strengthen” is used 137 times (CJCLDS, 2010). The goal of strengthening families is rather ambiguous and difficult to measure, and even the handbooks do not clearly state what constitutes strong families. Perhaps one could surmise that families are made strong through Church programs, but it quickly devolves into a circular argument. That is, Church programs are developed to strengthen families; and families are strong because they participate in Church programs. Despite begging the question and the apparent gap between intent and result, the Church and its members claim that Church programs do indeed strengthen families.

The greatest majority of those I interviewed did say that the Church strengthened families, although many said such success depended upon the individual person/family’s level of participation in Church programs and required following Church doctrine. Here are some of the replies to the question of what “strengthening families” meant to them. I have listed them all here to illustrate the varied way Mormons think about “strong families” and how the topics that influence their thoughts include topics like Church doctrine, temple ritual, the presence of

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<sup>195</sup> One could speculate that there may have been more women than men, or that women converts may be married to non-LDS men.

children, etc. In other words, there was not one common response that all or even a majority of Mormons interviewed used to describe what strengthening families meant to them.

- Families are stronger when they spend time together, like when we do family home evenings every week.
- It means we help each other if there is a problem.
- It is getting advice on parenting from the Church leaders and others in the ward.
- Well, it's when babies are blessed in Sacrament meeting and you see the father, the grandfather, and the great-grandfather all attend the blessing. That's a strong family.
- It means helping people understand the central role of family in society and doing everything we can to encourage people to create that family.
- It is being sealed together in the temple, living those covenants, and knowing you are an eternal family.
- It is when families try hard to get close to Heavenly Father and live His principals.
- It is using "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" as a guide for marriage and creating families.
- It is having a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- It is living the gospel.
- It is taking your kids to church every week and teaching them the commandments, teaching them how to be a good person, and helping them develop morality and integrity.
- Well – that's a sore spot because we don't have kids and so we don't feel like we can be a really strong family. It is part of the rigidity of the church I don't like.
- I was thrown out of my family when I joined the Church, so, I know that when you don't have a strong family it can be chaos.

While the responses are varied, there was one theme that seemed to be consistent in the conversations that followed those responses--strong families are families that spend time together. Sociologists in the College of Family Home and Social Sciences at BYU see a direct

connection between strong families and the time they spend together engaged in home ritual. Their research suggested that spending time engaged in domestic religious ritual (such as family home evening, family scripture reading, and family prayers) results in “strengthened relationships, more family togetherness and unity” in short, strong families (Loser, et al. 2009). I suggest a more accurate statement is that Church programs and home ritual strengthens the institutions of Church and family, and institutions of Church and family prompt more family togetherness.

### **Ward Callings**

A common thread that ran through much of the conversations I had with Mormons was that individuals are strengthened by filling callings in the Church. Although the connection between individuals feeling strengthened by their callings, and the theme of family within the LDS Church is not readily apparent, there is a connection that this section is meant to illuminate. Although many Mormons I interviewed told me that they have not always enjoyed their callings, but that having callings made them feel more a part of the group. Some of those I interviewed felt that serving in ward callings was an important way their families became strong. Usually they clarified this by stating that the blessings they got from filling ward callings helped their family or said that it helped remind them of what was truly important in life—family.

Perhaps one of the reasons many Mormons complain about their ward callings, is the inordinate amount of time serving in ward positions demands. Historian Matthew Bowman notes that it is not unusual for Mormons to spend upwards of fifteen to twenty hours a week attending to their ward duties (2012:217). That is a lot of time to be spent away from family, and could be seen as a conflict in interest since the Church emphasizes family and strongly encourages its

members to spend quality time with their family. This perceived conflict in interest prompted me to dig deeper into why Mormons felt that ward callings were so important.

As mentioned in chapter one, “callings” is the term that Mormons use to refer to lay leadership positions within the Church. This includes all church positions on every level. On a ward level, the bishop (similar to a pastor) formally invites, or “calls,” a person to fulfill a church position (e.g. Sunday school teacher, organist, choir director, home teacher, young women’s leader, relief society president, etc.). Callings on a ward (congregation) and stake level are temporary, usually lasting no longer than five years. Commonly, members serve serial callings, that is, as soon as they are released (exited) from one calling, they are called into a new position. While there is an hierarchical order to callings (bishop being the highest calling on a congregational level) there is not a standard order of progression. For instance, once a bishop is released he does not automatically get promoted to a stake leadership position, most often he is called to another position in his congregation such as a Sunday school teacher, a nursery worker, or to serve on a committee. However, in some congregations it is common for the same pool of people to be continually recycled through the system. In several of the interviews people mentioned this problem and referred to it as a “ward clique.” One middle-aged woman said

My last ward was very cliquish. Not many people moved in and out so people just kind of formed small groups around common interests. Like maybe they worked for the same company, or liked the same sports team. But it seemed that the same people were selected for callings over and over. For instance the primary president would move to be the relief society president and the young women’s president would replace the primary president. It was just kind of a circle going around. I don’t mean to sound cruel, but there was a narrow mindedness about who was eligible to fill callings. I didn’t like that.<sup>196</sup>

Sociologists Gary Shepherd and Gordon Shepherd (2001 [1994]) stated that the connection between individual member commitment and the LDS lay leadership cannot be overstated. The

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<sup>196</sup> Personal interview conducted June 30, 2012.



connection between organizational requirements and the willingness of the Church's members to invest a great deal of their personal and collective resources into the "recruitment, socialization, and maintenance" of not only the Church, but an unusually large missionary force, must be taken into account in any consideration of Mormonism (163).

As the LDS Church shifted their focus from priesthood to family, local ward callings took on a new emphasis as well. Historian Jan Shipps (1978) notes that this change in emphasis meant that support for families became the central thrust of church programs: "The local ward (parish) is a community of families; ward activities, standardized throughout the nation, are planned to engender family solidarity" (766). The process of standardization is known as the correlation movement.

As the church membership grew both within and outside of the United States there was an increasing emphasis on a centralized institutional authority. The church's General Authorities felt that correct and uniform behavior under the direction of the priesthood with an eye toward "perfecting the Saints" (CJCLDS, 2003 [1989]:562) and strengthening families was necessary. This prompted the 1961 establishment of an all-Church Coordinating Council which would be known as "priesthood correlation" and commonly be referred to simply as "correlation" which led to the establishment of some of the most widespread forms of Church service or calling—home teaching (ibid).

In order for the reader to be able to link ward callings to the construction of the Mormon symbolic system of family, the history of Church structures that establish systems of care is helpful. Specifically, it is important to understand the connection between attempts at making the Church as globally uniform as possible and how systems (callings) of care are at the core of Church programs.

### *Correlation*

Harold B. Lee of the quorum of the Twelve Apostles led the committee; one of his major goals was to provide a clear power structure within the church (Church Educational System, 1989:562; Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:597; Bowman, 2012:190-197). Along with stressing the need for coordinated efforts between auxiliary groups and establishing clear power structures, church curriculum and organization under correlation was to become globally uniform. To accomplish this, Elder Lee used the American corporation as his model for the church's bureaucratic structure (Bowman, 2012:195).

Several factors were at the root of the perceived need for establishing the all-Church Coordinating Council. The reason listed in official Church publications is a need for coordinated efforts between groups. Historian Matthew Bowman (2012) sees it as a much more complicated matter. Bowman provides an historical context of events that were happening ten years prior to the formation of the Coordinating Council which sheds light on the bureaucratic importance of this move.

Throughout the 1950s the church had started to grow in geographical areas that were, quite frankly, embarrassingly problematic for the church due to its stand on race. Prior to 1978 black men were not allowed to hold the priesthood. This created an organizational problem in areas such as Nigeria since all church leaders must also be members of the priesthood. It became even more of a problem in places such as Brazil where generations of interracial marriage made the task of deciding who was black, and therefore not eligible for the priesthood and subsequent leadership positions, very difficult (192). Lastly, there were auxiliary groups worldwide that had their own organizational structure including fundraising and leadership.

Bowman reports that by 1950 these problems created nearly unmanageable fragmentation within the church (194). In short - Salt Lake City was losing control of the church leadership, even within Utah. The solution was to mandate coordination between groups which not only gave power back to Salt Lake City which effectively swept the race issue under the rug for another seventeen years. But, race issues could not be put off indefinitely. On June 9, 1978 Church president Spencer W. Kimball officially announced that the restriction against black men holding the priesthood had been revoked.<sup>197</sup>

Correlation helped bring the Church back under a central control and created a Mormon culture by standardizing many of the LDS religious experiences (Mauss, 1994:166). There were at least two major innovations to come out of the Correlation Committee's restructuring—the refinement of ward teaching into the “home teaching program” and the establishment of “family home evening.”

#### *Home and visiting teachers.*

Home teachers are males, visiting teachers are females and neither position is called, rather they are assigned. Although called “home teaching” and “visiting teaching” actual teaching such as delivering a doctrinal lesson, is not the main goal or focus of these programs. The goal of home and visiting teachers is to ascertain family needs, serve as a liaison to ward leaders, and develop friendships. This service as a liaison replaced one duty of a paid clergy that would be found in other religious traditions. Although home and visiting teachers are supposed to provide an uplifting message to those they visit, generally speaking home and visiting teachers are thought of more of a resource rather than a teacher.

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<sup>197</sup> The ruling against “black men” did not specifically include Latinos or Asians, but the case in Brazil made it clear that defining exactly what constituted “black” was problematic.

Part of the cultural environment of the Burned-Over District was a particular type of community-mindedness that comingled with religion. Many held that the aim of creating a good society included the habit of frank curiosity in one's neighbors--a "holy enterprise of minding other people's business" (Cross, 1950:81). Rather than being interpreted as intrusive, it was seen as a form of taking care of one another, and a way to look after the larger group as a whole. For Mormonism, this mindset of minding each other's business led to the establishment of ward teachers.

Ward teachers are male priesthood holders within the congregations. It was the teachers' responsibility to visit people in the ward on a monthly basis and report back to the bishop. The ward teachers were asked to become personally acquainted with all the family members and assess the family's spiritual welfare and needs (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:597). They are also encouraged to fellowship (befriend) those who are inactive.

In 1964, ward teachers were replaced by "home teachers" but the duties of said teachers remained the same. Church leaders felt that one way to stimulate activity among the men in the ward was to "encourage them in their obligations to visit families in the ward" (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976:467]). In a 1982 *Ensign* (Church magazine) article "The Missionary Work We Call Home Teaching," previous Church president Harold B. Lee was quoted as saying: "Missionary work is but home teaching to those who are not now members of the Church, and home teaching is nothing more or less than missionary work to Church members" (as quoted in Parry, 1982:10).

In addition to doing missionary work, and accessing spiritual needs, home teachers are also encouraged to ascertain family and individual needs. They are urged to provide friendship

and support to those they visit. These friendships are “a crucial factor in explaining the emotional and spiritual cohesiveness of Mormon culture” (Givens, 2004:172).

“Visiting teaching” is done by the adult women in the congregation and coordinated through the Relief Society. Like their male counterparts, women are also encouraged to form friendships, look after spiritual and temporal needs and help those who are less active return to church. Generally speaking, it is the visiting teachers who help the women in the congregation especially just after a baby is born. Visiting teachers will bring in meals to a new mother (including mothers of newly adopted babies) and may also help with other needs such as looking after older children, cleaning the house, doing laundry, etc. Of course, like in most all other cases, such care is not exclusive to Mormonism. I have yet to find a congregation of any tradition that does not look after its members in similar ways. Theologian Lisa Sowle Cahill labels this type of caring for other congregants as the “moral duties that distinctively mark the Christian life” (2000:6).

For Mormons, the fact that this type of caring for others is a calling makes it a religious duty. Mormon scholar Givens (2004) also makes the following observation:

Although socials and service projects and worship services provide the same opportunities for social contact found in other religious traditions, home and visiting teaching are the most reliable, comprehensive, and perhaps more significantly, horizontally structured mechanism in Mormonism for fostering personal interaction and reciprocal service among members (172).

Besides such functions of care being bureaucratically structured, and therefore reliable, Givens states that the home teachers, and the assistance they offer, are depended upon by those under their care. He states that “many Mormons facing crises, major or minor emergencies, or a simple doctrinal question, are apt to call on their home teacher before anyone else” (2004:172). Within the Mormon culture there are many stories of home teachers administering to the sick, making

hospital visits, and assisting members with a number of various needs. In other words, Mormon home teachers often do the work of professional clergy found in other religious traditions.

One extreme form of service offered by a home teacher was the instance of a woman donating a kidney to a man that she and her husband were neighbors to and had been assigned to as home teachers. Home teaching is always done in pairs. While it is customary that two men (usually father and teenage son) are home teaching pairs (also called companions, just as pairs of missionaries are called companions), it can also be the case that a husband and wife are assigned as home teaching companions. It is preferred that a son be a companion with his father as a way of teaching the son how to care for others in the capacity of being a home teacher, as well as provide a time for fathers and sons to spend together fulfilling a Church calling. Yet it is also the case that spending time together and fulfilling a Church calling together as a couple, just as older missionary couples do, has its benefits as well.

I first saw this story in the *Deseret News* on March 16, 2012. Reporter Wendy Leonard (2012a) wrote about the way Debbie Beck learned of her neighbor's need for a transplant, and having been a transplant nurse at a local hospital had an insider's view to his situation and knew that donor kidneys were in short supply. She secretly had herself tested to be sure she was a viable donor before telling her neighbor she would be donating one of her kidneys to him. The article was a bit vague about the connection between the donor being the home teacher to the recipient Russell Maynes, and how that played into her decision to give him one of her kidneys. Therefore, I contacted the reporter to ask for clarification. Leonard verified that Beck and her husband were home teachers to the Maynes family. Leonard said that Beck mentioned this calling (of being a home teacher to Maynes) a couple of times in the interview and even joked that she "didn't just bring cookies" to Maynes. Maynes and Beck are both LDS and had moved

into the predominately LDS neighborhood at about the same time roughly five years ago.

Leonard was not certain if the Becks had been Maynes home teachers for the entire five years as neither mentioned that. Leonard said that Beck mentioned multiple times how she felt inspired by God to offer her kidney to Maynes. Likewise, Maynes mentioned often how Beck was an answer to his and his family's prayers.

One other surprise I found in Utah newspapers was the frequency that Mormons listed "faithful home teacher" or "great visiting teacher" as a life accomplishment in obituaries. The first time I ran across this was in a small Utah County newspaper (where the population is still predominately LDS) so I thought it was a local Mormon quirk. To test that notion I ran a query looking for obituaries of Mormons throughout the U.S. To my surprise I found such mentions much more far flung than I would have ever imagined. As expected, I found them in the small Utah County towns as well as Utah cities.<sup>198</sup> Since I had originally suspected it was a local quirk, I was surprised to find the same type of obituaries in cities and town in Idaho, Wyoming, Arizona, Florida, and even one in Alberta (Canada). These mentions of faithful service as a home or visiting teaching, perhaps even more than the stories of service themselves, indicated that serving in these positions was important to those who held these callings and to the Mormon communities they served.

The most commonly mentioned type of service home teachers offer is assistance in moving. A single woman in the New Jersey ward told me the story of telling a non-member co-worker that people in her church were helping her move.<sup>199</sup> She said she was very grateful for the

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<sup>198</sup> Utah cities and towns include Orem, Provo, Springville, American Fork, Santaquin, Payson, Pleasant Grove, Plain City, Tremonton, Holden, Midway, Hyrum, and Salt Lake City.

<sup>199</sup> In New Jersey the wards incorporate a much larger geographic area than they do in Utah since there are relatively few Mormons in the state. Therefore, in this case the woman moved to a neighboring city, but stayed in the same ward. In Utah even a move across the street puts Mormons into new wards. In both cases, whether a person is moving within the ward, moving out of the ward or moving into the ward they will be helped by the local ward on both ends of the move.

men that had helped, including the bishop and named a few of the men that had come to help. In the list of names was a fairly well known professional football player. The woman said her co-worker stopped her and said “wait! The professional football player? How do you know him, and what is he doing helping you move?” The woman explained to her co-worker “he’s in my ward, that’s just what we do. In the LDS Church everyone just helps everyone.”<sup>200</sup>

There were numerous mentions of home and visiting teachers throughout the interviews I conducted. I think however, that summing up the ways that home and visiting teaching extends beyond friendly visits to fellow congregants in their homes, can be illustrated by observations I made at a Mormon funeral. While not apparent to the casual observer, the visiting teachers and home teachers played an important part in the funeral services.

The deceased was a family member of a very close friend who is Mormon (as was the deceased). While attending and preparing for the services I paid special attention to who participated, and who did not. The visiting teaching companion of a surviving family member played the harp during the viewing and also played the piano during the funeral service.<sup>201</sup>

The first speaker at the funeral service had been the home teacher of the deceased for seventeen years. The second speaker was a former bishop and neighbor. One of the three sons gave the life sketch, another attended but did not participate, and one son who had left the church over sexuality issues refused to attend the services. I am not certain if those who attended were merely being polite or if they knew why the son was not in attendance, but no one questioned his absence. I helped with some of the arrangements and details, but noted that most of the help was coming from the ward members (congregants).

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<sup>200</sup> Personal conversation February 22, 2011.

<sup>201</sup> Similar to a wake, and common across the U.S., a viewing is a common practice in the Mormon culture where friends and family can come to the funeral home to view the deceased and say their goodbyes as well as to provide sympathy and support to grieving family members.



The relief society president was at the family's home before other family members arrived. She helped clean the home and make it ready for visitors and helped me box the clothes of the deceased which would be donated to a local charity. She also arranged to have food brought in. The dinners that arrived contained enough food to feed at least eight people and were quite delicious. The bishop came to help the family make arrangements for the services at the church and at the gravesite. He asked questions about what prayers the family wanted said (e.g. a simple gravesite prayer or a formal grave dedication) and who the family would like to say them.<sup>202</sup>

Those who say formal prayers such as the dedication of the grave must be approved by the bishop and hold the proper LDS priesthood authority. The bishop also discussed financial needs the family would incur. The bishop assured the family that the church would help the family work through such financial issues and suggested they meet later in the month for further discussion. Both the relief society president and the bishop were kind, loving, and professional in their offering aid and support. Knowing that LDS clergy (and relief society president women) do not receive formal training in how to handle such issues I commented on the fact that they must have handled many of these in order to have gained such proficiency. I was surprised to learn that this was the first funeral both had assisted with and further, that both had held their current positions for less than a month.

While there are many stories related about the success of home and visiting teaching, as with the issue of callings, there are also stories of it not being carried out in the spirit of the task.

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<sup>202</sup>In LDS funerals the grave dedication is a prayer given by a man holding the Melchizedek priesthood (level of priesthood usually for men age 19 and over). The dedicatory prayer includes addressing Heavenly Father, a statement by the person offering the prayer that they are doing so by the authority of the Melchizedek priesthood, a statement consecrating the burial plot as the resting place for the deceased, a plea that the place will be hallowed and protected until the Resurrection, a plea asking God to comfort the family, the dedication ends in the name of Jesus Christ (CJCLDS, 2010:176).

For instance, in one interview a woman told me of an experience she had had in another ward in North Salt Lake. A woman who was new to the ward had asked the relief society president for help after having surgery, but was told that there were too many people asking for help and all the visiting teachers had already been assigned people to care for. Luckily for the woman, others in the ward heard about the need for help and they stepped in on their own and offered aid. In this instance the woman telling the story talked about service to others being the Christian thing to do whether they are assigned to do it or not.

In a recent national public radio broadcast of *On Being*, Krista Tippett interviewed Jesuit Priest Greg Boyle about his work with gang members. Father Boyle stated that he felt that service and compassion are essential elements in any community. He states that “service is not an end in itself, but a beginning toward finding real kinship with others” (Tippett, 2013). He also feels that “the measure of our compassion lies not in our service of those on the margins, but in our willingness to see ourselves in kinship (with one another)” (ibid). In this sense, no one stands outside the circle of compassion. While this indicates that the Mormon sense of kinship is in some ways not unique, it also sums up the approach to callings that I heard in my interviews. “Helping each other, it’s just what we do.”<sup>203</sup>

Finding time to provide service and compassion is not always easy. As stated previously, one of the interview questions asked the interviewee about their experiences in other wards. They often mentioned a contrast to the ward they were currently living in where they did feel the sense of kinship Father Boyle referred to. These contrasting stories were instances where the person felt a lack of compassion, service, and kinship.

Lack of service was revealed when Mormons recounted instances where home and visiting teaching is being outsourced or re-invented. There was one story of a woman hiring a

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<sup>203</sup> Personal interview conducted March 3, 2013.

landscape gardener to fulfill her duties of planting flowers on the temple grounds. The person telling me the story was shocked that anyone would even consider doing such a thing. In some of the more wealthy areas of New Jersey, it was not uncommon for a relief society sister to volunteer to help serve the ward by bringing a covered dish to a ward function (such as a lunch for the missionaries, a lunch after a funeral, a ward dinner, etc.) only to have her household staff (usually a live-in nanny) actually prepare the dish and bring it to the church in her stead. Granted, the New Jersey women who had their household staff prepare and deliver food for them did have full-time jobs. Yet, other women who did the work themselves (including women in New Jersey and Utah) were also employed full time. Those who outsource their callings may argue that they are simply using their resources and their time to the best of their ability, and that it is more important for them to find ways to be able to spend more time with their family. Those who reported these instances (who were themselves employed full-time and did not outsource their callings) felt this type of outsourcing was not the same as personally serving others. They stressed that the ultimate goal was not to simply get the job done in the most expedient manner, but that the goal was to learn to serve others. Ultimately, what may be the unspoken issue at hand is a case of economic disparity. The women who were working full-time outside of the home and had the resources to have someone else do their Church work for them had the ability to spend time with their family as well as fulfill Church callings, while the women who did not have the same access to those types of resources had to choose which to sacrifice—less time with family or less time with Church.

In cases of visiting teaching being re-invented, I heard many instances of relief society sisters (visiting teachers) counting email correspondence, a quick visit in the supermarket, or a group gathering, as having done their visiting teaching. It is becoming popular for home and

visiting teachers to have gatherings in their home inviting all they are assigned to home teach to come to their home rather than individually visiting those they are assigned to in their own homes. I think this current trend is simply due to being overly busy; people just do not have the time to personally visit someone in their home. And conversely, many may enjoy an evening out where they can visit with others, especially since there is very little time to socialize at church. Others may find such an approach too impersonal. While some home and visiting teachers may not feel that electronic contact is the same as a personal visit, it can be argued that any contact is better than none. There is also merit in innovative ways of gathering people together to help create community.

*Habitus and an ethic of care within ward callings.*

The LDS bureaucratic structure of lay leadership establishes callings that instill a duty to care for others. Service becomes an institutionally constructed disposition and a part of an LDS lifestyle. Callings create the opportunity to perform rituals of care such as taking dinners to new mothers, helping someone move, assisting with funeral arrangements, etc. Performing these rituals help those who participate in them (as either giver or receiver of care) to develop emotive bonds with each other. It is often the case that in ward settings, especially in Utah, Caring for each other through ward callings means caring for your neighbor. Interacting with neighbors and creating emotional bonds with them through acts of care replicates small town life, where people tended to know each other, a pattern no longer as prevalent amid the sprawl of suburbs or the denseness of urban life, yet still a pattern in Mormon life. This pattern of care becomes so instilled that it creates a system of dispositions which integrate perceptions and actions to facilitate the desired outcomes of communally established tasks, which then reproduce

themselves through the repeated execution of those tasks. This process embodies Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus*.

*Habitus* guides behavior and thinking through structured patterns that ultimately shape those practices and structures. This continual interplay of structuring and being structured creates and reproduces the set of dispositions, or *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984:170). This recursive process is what BYU English professor Eugene England's 1986 article, "Why the Church is as True as the Gospel," explored. England's article details his thoughts about the connection between callings, service, and the gospel. He states that the two keys to this connection are Church structure, including lay leadership, and congregations that are organized geographically rather than by choice. Both of these keys "give truth and meaning to the religious life of Mormons" (England, 1986:33).

In the case of lay leadership everyone has some opportunity to receive a calling and thus participate in the Church on a practical, experiential level. England states that such involvement "teaches us patience as well as courage and discipline. It makes us responsible for the personal and marital, physical and spiritual welfare of people we may not already love (or may even heartily dislike), and thus we learn to love them" (England, 1986:32). As for congregations, England states that congregations organized geographically bring Mormons into direct relationship with people not of their choosing, and that forced encounter can be "profoundly redemptive in potential, in part *because* they are not consciously chosen" (33). This geographic organization establishes a set of relationships, and those relationships are structured through callings, which in turn instill a duty to care for others—we have come full circle.

This circular process of the establishment of *habitus* through the structure of Church callings and the repeated performance or execution of callings is what I have named an ethic of

care. It is more than just the set of dispositions, or *habitus*, itself, and more than the act of fulfilling callings, it is the combined mix of patterns that establish a lifestyle, a way of *being* Mormon. I will return to discuss an ethic of care in chapter seven.

### **Church Discourse and Rhetoric**

When considering Church discourse, the logical first source to explore was *The Book of Mormon*. Regardless of whether one believes that the *Book of Mormon* is “true”<sup>204</sup> one must recognize that it is the lynchpin of Mormonism. It is the source of Smith’s claim to prophet status, and the foundation of the Church he established (Givens, 2008:93). Joseph Smith himself noted: “take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none” (Smith, 1978b:52).

As stated previously, Smith was said to have had a “preoccupation with familial relationships” (Bowman, 2012:xiv) which is reflected in his work *The Book of Mormon*.<sup>205</sup> The book opens with Nephi introducing himself to the reader as a record keeper of his people. The first sentence of his account begins: “I Nephi, having been born of goodly parents” (1 Nephi:1) which places himself firmly within the bounds of a nuclear family. The narratives throughout the rest of the book are stories of diasporic families and the trials they face as a people.

Palmer’s 1982 dissertation looked at the image of family in the *Book of Mormon* and states that the family seems to be taken for granted within the text. He notes that family institutions are portrayed as nuclear sized groups that are not the apparent focus of social interest.

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<sup>204</sup> Most Mormons believe that the Book of Mormon is an historically accurate account of an ancient people and is literally “true.”

<sup>205</sup> Most Mormons believe that Smith was merely the translator of an ancient book which had been written in “reformed Egyptian” (Quinn, 1998:194) on golden plates rather than the author. There are many theories about the source of the *Book of Mormon*, and scholars such as Fawn Brodie (1995 91971]), and Michael Quinn (1998) have lost Church membership for their views of Smith being more of an author, who’s writing reflected personal beliefs and experiences as much as cultural issues of his day, than a translator. Others such as Hugh Nibley (1988) have devoted their scholarship to demonstrating the ancient origin of the *Book of Mormon* .

Palmer interprets the narratives of Lehi and Jared leaving their homelands in small groups as an indication of “isolated families turning inward for refuge from the outside world” (Palmer, 1982:83-4). Palmer stated that the diasporic experiences of Mormons as they journeyed into Utah were parallel with the Old Testament’s “children of Israel.” Yet rather than the family as a chosen people, within Mormonism, “the nuclear family began to be emphasized as an eternal, religious group” (4). In other words, while Mormons are a chosen people as a group, the group itself is not an eternal unit; the family is the eternal unit.

Another source of Church are television ads, movies, books, and art that have family as their central theme. Much of the rhetoric produced by the Church is aimed at correcting or overcoming stereotypes and caricatures of Mormons. Historian J.B. Haws pointed out that much of the work produced by Mormon artists, reveal how they want themselves and other Mormons to be seen by others (2013:194). Yet, there is also rhetoric produced by Mormons for Mormons.

Church produced rhetoric on family often takes the form of art Mormons buy to display in their homes. I mentioned earlier in this chapter, many Mormons have a copy of “The Proclamation” framed and prominently displayed in their home, yet there are other similar objects that may be even more common in LDS homes. The most common object I observed being displayed in LDS homes are wall plaques that have some variation of the Church’s message nearing on tag line “families can be together forever.” In the “Art and Home” section of Deseret Book, a Church owned bookstore, it is possible to buy items such as picture frames with the words “families are forever” etched on them, and other sources sell everything from doormats to bracelets featuring the same phrase in your choice of language. More than one half of the homes I did interviews in had something in the living room stating “families are forever.” Other items displayed included photos of an LDS temple (usually the one they were married in),

small statues of LDS temples, and always family photos. I often asked about the art and items displayed and found that often the things like wall plaques were something they had made themselves in a Relief Society homemaking night.

Perhaps one of the most compelling sources of Church rhetoric is General Conference. There are two elements I will address on the topic of General Conference: culture, and doctrine-- both of which produce, their own unique forms of rhetoric used in the entextualization of family. Since General Conference is so important to Mormons and Mormonism in general, I feel it helpful to provide a thick description of this meeting.

### *General Conference*

General Conference (or Conference) is the semi-annual gathering for all Mormons worldwide. Meetings are held in the conference center in Salt Lake City (which seats 21,000) in April and October. Although tickets are required to attend in person (and are often difficult to obtain due to high demand) anyone over the age of eight can attend the general sessions (members and non-members alike).<sup>206</sup> It is a large social event in Utah and many family reunions are organized around attending these meetings. For instance, the Deseret News ran a story about an Idaho family who travels to Utah every six months to attend Conference; an event that is now a three generation tradition (Leer, 2012).

Obviously not every Mormon or everyone who wants to attend can, so the meetings are broadcast in several formats to make the meetings as globally accessible as possible. In Utah, I have heard many accounts of families preparing special meals to have while watching

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<sup>206</sup> Tickets can be obtained from local church priesthood holders (usually bishops have them), or you can request them through the temple square events ticket office by phone. On the day of the conference standby seating is available at the temple square ticket office, but a long line forms very early and very few are awarded tickets. For those who cannot acquire tickets, overflow seating is available on temple square in other venues where the meeting is broadcast via satellite.



Conference from home.<sup>207</sup> I hear members say they really love doing that because they can “go to church in their pajamas” on that day.

Meetings are also broadcast via satellite to many of the Church’s chapels where members gather to watch the meetings together. General Conference sessions are broadcast over the radio, and internet (including YouTube, tweets, and the conference website [gc.lds.org](http://gc.lds.org)) through iTunes bookstore, Amazon Kindle, and in Utah, over some local TV networks. Sermons are translated into 94 different languages including American Sign Language.<sup>208</sup> Past meetings are archived and stored on the LDS.org website and can be accessed online anytime or you may order CDs and DVDs from the Church’s website or from one of its distribution centers (which also sells temple garments and clothes, LDS books, etc.). In other words, what is said at General Conference is considered so important that there are a wide range of efforts to make sure that everyone has access to the teachings.

Still, despite its broadcast and print accessibility, Mormons tend to want to watch/listen communally, and attending in person is a very special event. I have attended General Conference by watching the meetings in the local church building in New Jersey, and attended in person in Salt Lake. My experience of attending in Salt Lake was memorable. I went with a few other people from the Salt Lake ward and we took the train into downtown as we knew parking would be difficult. I have never seen a light rail train so full of happy, polite, and uniformly well-dressed people! The vast majority of men on the train were dressed in dark suits and ties and the women were in dresses or skirts. The train was pretty crowded and became fuller at every stop.

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<sup>207</sup> In Utah, General Conference is broadcast over the Church owned network television station KSL.

<sup>208</sup> In all of the local meetings I have attended congregants do have access to devices for the hard of hearing and some translation (mostly Spanish), but I have never seen a sign interpreter at any LDS meeting. For General Conference, ASL translations are done after the meetings. These translations are filmed, then distributed through the Church outlets as “materials for those with disabilities.”

[http://store.lds.org/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/Category3\\_715839595\\_10557\\_21236\\_-1\\_Y\\_image\\_0](http://store.lds.org/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/Category3_715839595_10557_21236_-1_Y_image_0)

Each time a woman got on a man would stand up and offer her his seat. By the time we got to our downtown stop, the cars were full, and not one woman was standing, only the men stood.

As we arrived at the downtown train platform, I noticed what appeared to be a homeless man in a wheelchair. There were several plastic bags hanging from his chair, and two dogs sat at his feet. He looked cold and unkempt, and was holding a sign asking for a conference ticket. At the time I wondered if anyone would give up their ticket for him, especially since tickets were rare and dear. If someone did give him their ticket would the ushers let him in, dressed as he was? What about his wheelchair and dogs? All the information I had seen on how to attend conference had stated that if you need wheelchair seating you have to inform the center two weeks in advance.<sup>209</sup> I thought about giving him my ticket, but I knew that my friends had pulled several strings in order for me to attend; I thought giving away the ticket they had worked hard to get for me would offend them, so I walked on. The next morning in the Deseret News I was pleased, and a bit relieved, to see a photo of the man and his dogs in the conference center. Someone had indeed given up their ticket for him and the staff inside the center not only let him in, but his dogs as well. There was no write up about the man, just a photo among many of those taken that day with a caption that read “service dogs and attendee during the 182<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Conference for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City Sunday, April 2, 2012” (Walker, 2012).<sup>210</sup>

On the way into the conference center we passed several groups of young men and women singing hymns. There were several groups of people holding signs asking for tickets

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<sup>209</sup> See Deseret News “How to attend, watch, or listen to general conference” dated April 4, 2013 <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/765626084/How-to-attend-watch-or-listen-to-LDS-general-conference.html?pg=all>.

<sup>210</sup> Naturally, being a social scientist and a skeptic at heart I wondered if the Church owned newspaper staff had not found a ticket for him just for the photo opportunity it would provide. Surely many people saw this man wanting a ticket, and many, like me, would have had the reaction of feeling relief that someone had been unselfish and this man and his dogs were allowed to attend conference. The homeless man’s presence at conference certainly put a very human face on the Church meeting that day.

along with a smattering of protestors. I happened to make eye contact with one of the more zealous protestors holding a large cross; he apparently interpreted this as an invitation to yell directly at me. It was almost refreshing to be reminded that I was a wicked sinner bound straight for hell. Despite his loud curses, no one seemed to be paying much attention to him or the other protestors, except maybe the police officers were scattered along the sidewalk keeping an eye on both the protestors and the “sinful” conference attendees.

As I was making my way into the building through the light spring snow, I reflected on how these large meetings may mirror the tent revivals of the early 1800s out of which Mormonism arose. I realized that those early tent meetings never really died, they just got bigger and more diverse in their format, and moved inside, out of the weather. Then, as now, there is an important element of maintaining and perpetuating group identity through these gatherings.

Conference meetings are spread across two days, Saturday and Sunday with two “sessions” (meetings) each day, each lasting about two hours. The Saturday evening session is always reserved for the men as a priesthood meeting. This meeting, like all others, requires a ticket to enter. Since the meeting is for priesthood holders only, men ages 12 and up attend this event.<sup>211</sup> Women meet separately about one week earlier. I am not certain if men would be turned away from the women’s meeting, but in the past women have been turned away from the priesthood meeting.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> A man who had previously served as a bishop verified that the priesthood meeting is a ticketed event and tickets are issued by local bishops. Since this is the case, the bishop would be aware if someone was or was not a priesthood holder, but regardless, allotting the ticket would be up to the local bishop. Granting a ticket to a “prospective priesthood holder” is common. Even though this is technically “closed” meeting (men only) the sermons given in this session are included in all archived materials on the Church website and anyone can watch these pre-recorded sessions.

<sup>212</sup> In October of 2013, about 150 women from the group “Ordain Women” arrived at temple square for the Priesthood session of General Conference and asked to be admitted. They were all turned away, one by one. They have asked the Church offices for tickets for the April 2014 Priesthood session of Conference and have been told that they should keep their “protest” outside of temple square. Further, the Church has issued a statement saying that all media will be banned from temple square during Conference weekend.

I found that General Conference is important to Mormons in several ways, but one specific way that relates to my main argument. By meeting together as global church, Mormons are given the chance to see themselves as part of a greater whole that extends past their local ward/congregation. They are given a glimpse of being part of a “human family” and a Church that is flexible, expansive, and without ward boundaries. Being visibly part of a greater whole further reinforces ideas that ward and Church are greater than the local unit.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a thick description of elements found in the ward such as Church programs and ward callings, and provided a look at more expansive Church-wide issues such as marriage culture, temple ritual, Church rhetoric and the global gatherings of general conference. This chapter illustrated how the Church focuses on family through temple ritual which anchors ideas of family within the Church, and also provides a template for expanding ideas of family beyond the nuclear family unit. Through temple ritual and ward callings Mormons learn to work together and caring for each other like a family would.

The nuclear family unit is grounded in the LDS Church through a culture of marriage which is more deeply entrenched within the Church itself through temple ritual. Callings in the Church make performing acts of care for others a Christian duty and evoke emotive bonds as well as belief in Church. An established ethic of care, as modeled through acts of service, provides a template families can use in caring for each other, and makes those cared for and doing the caring feel like family. My interviews reflected ideas that when family members feel cared for they feel closer as a family. In other words, strong families perform acts of care for one another.

Meeting together in congregations, serving each other, attending major religious events such as General Conference all fuel the collective effervesce which transforms the everyday into the sacred and stimulates a strong sense of group cohesiveness. This is furthered by the standardization, even if not always true in practice, of ward callings. Caring for each other becomes an ethic of care, a practice, a habit.

By examining themes of family within the LDS Church I have illuminated the process of entextualization of the idea of family. As outlined in chapter one, the process of entextualization of family includes taking texts and or ideas from four main sources: Church doctrine, Church rhetoric, home and temple ritual, and social rhetoric and then re-contextualizing it in the social context of congregation. By fulfilling ward callings, and participating in ritual, ideas of family are continually entextualized and re-contextualized forming the generative foundation for a *habitus*, or an ethic of care. An ethic of care is a way of being Mormon in the world and in the ward. A *habitus* of care enables Mormons to love and serve others in ways that family members are assumed to love and serve each other.

## Chapter Six: Family Units: Social Structures of Family

### Hymn #298: Home Can be a Heaven on Earth<sup>213</sup>

*I ask the middle-aged woman sitting across from me how important the LDS focus on family is to her. She tells me: I think family really is the basis of life. When you think about it, every species on earth, their big driving force is really to have a family. And, so it's logical that the whole center of existence is around that family unit I think family is really the basis of life—it is everything.<sup>214</sup>*

As I asked individuals about the importance of family, many had replies similar to the woman's above. The statements often reflected beliefs about family through doxic relations to the structure of family.<sup>215</sup> Just as Mormon identity is shaped by history, rhetoric of family within society, Church doctrine, ritual, and bureaucratic structures, it is also shaped by the actual construction of family. Ideas about the construction of family, and what constitutes a family, arise from several sources; for Mormons one of those textual sources is “The Proclamation” which strongly states that the family consists of a husband, wife, and their children, in other words, what we often think of as a nuclear or traditional family. Yet it is also the lived experience of kinship networks, gender roles within family units, marriage, and the broader human family. When all of these sources of what it means to be family are entextualized into the lived experience of family, the idea of family is re-contextualized a capacious and robust expression of kinship networks within family units, ward, and community.<sup>216</sup> Although this capacious idea and lived experience of family is in direct contrast to the official Church rhetoric of family as found in “The Family: A

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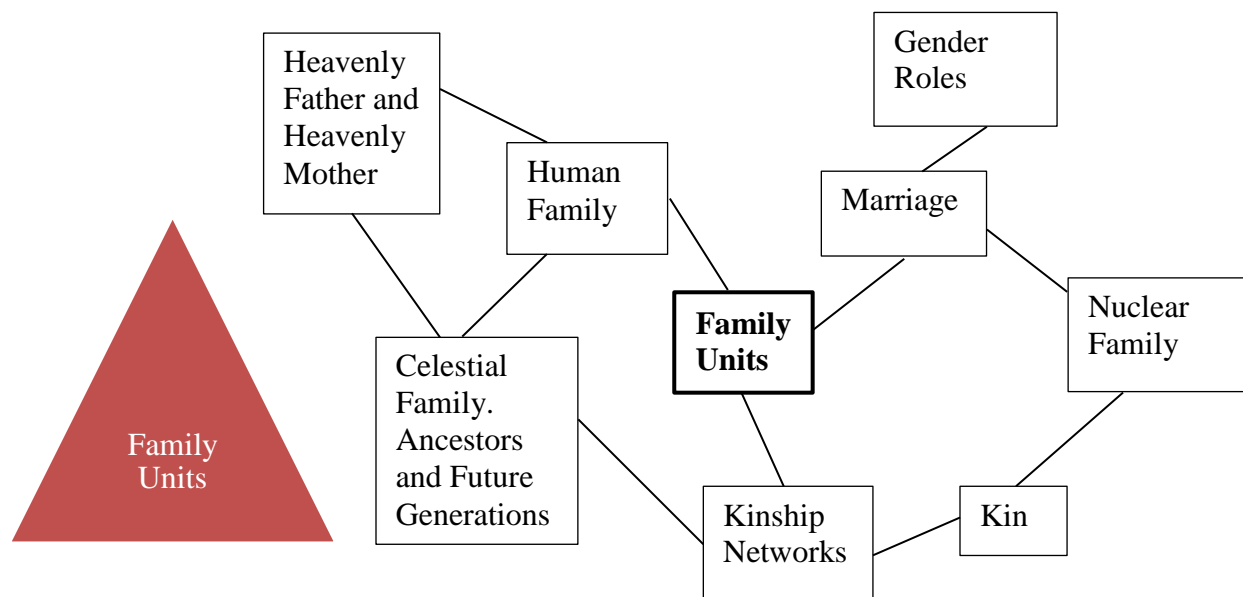
<sup>213</sup> This hymn is a favorite for the weekly family ritual of Family Home Evening. In Sunday services it is used more often in children's meetings such as Primary rather than in the Sacrament meeting. The hymn contains lyrics referencing meeting together each week as a family, serving God with cheerful hearts, showing kindness and charity to others, and an ultimate home in heaven.

<sup>214</sup> Personal interview conducted July 6, 2012.

<sup>215</sup> Bourdieu, 1977.

<sup>216</sup> Entextualization is a term often used in linguistic anthropology to refer to the ways cultural meaning is produced in the practice of speaking. It considers how text becomes a cultural object which can be reproduced by both speakers and listeners. An excellent paper on this topic “The Entextualization of Talk” was delivered by Richard R. Young of the University of Wisconsin-Madison at a joint symposium *Defining and Assessing Speaking Ability*, held at the annual meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics and the Language Testing Research Colloquium on February 24, 2001 in St. Louis Missouri. His paper can be found at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.28.8545&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

Proclamation to the World,” the phenomena of *ward families* illustrates how applying an extended and flexible idea of family in group settings produces caring and cohesive communities. In order to fully understand the process of entextualization and re-contextualization, it is necessary to understand the initial textual sources of family--this chapter illuminates those sources



### **Family Units: Social structures of LDS families**

Let me begin to tease out all of the individual threads of these definitions by discussing what is often referred to as the nuclear family and kinship—how society thinks about who belongs to those groups and why.

#### The Nuclear Family

What has become commonly referred to as the “nuclear family” is a heteronormative model of a married couple and their biological offspring which is often taken to be the definition of family. In my conversations with Mormons I found they did not use the term nuclear family specifically, but made reference to it. For example when I was talking to a middle-aged married woman about

how important the Church's focus on family was to her she said that when she got married she moved away from her "home nucleus where my family was"<sup>217</sup> meaning her parents and siblings. She felt that the focus on family made her work on keeping those family bonds even though she moved away. It was evident then that she still felt a connection to her natal nuclear family although she was married with grown children of her own.

Goode defined the "nuclear family" as a "couple and children" (1963:1). This is the most commonly accepted meaning of this term, and the one provided in most dictionaries.<sup>218</sup> As sociologists like Judith Stacey have noted, "in most of Europe and North America the family has become nearly synonymous with the nuclear household unit made up of a married, heterosexual couple and their biological or adopted children" (1996:38).

Talcott Parsons gave a very precise definition of the nuclear family when he stated that the nuclear family consisted of parents and their still dependent children who occupy a separate dwelling apart from other extended family members of either spouse (i.e. the children's grandparents) (Parsons and Bales, 1955:10). While Parsons did not specifically identify a heterosexual pairing of father and mother as the parents, footnotes clarify that a "normal" arrangement consisted of husband and wife families (ibid). Here the "normalcy" of the arrangement is a lack of adult children in the home as well as only a small percentage of family units being led by widowed or divorced parents rather than the sexual orientation of parents. In other words, heteronormativity was both implied and expected.

Goode obviously did not include homosexual couples and children as a legitimate form of family as he states that it seems certain that "heterosexuality is 'prewired' biologically" which impacts family roles and social structures (1982 [1964]:25). While Goode does include the

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<sup>217</sup> Personal interview conducted June 23, 2012.

<sup>218</sup> See Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary entry "nuclear family" found at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nuclear%20family>. Accessed July 10, 2013.



presence of illegitimate children, his work does not fully address single-parent family units.<sup>219</sup>

Nuclear families are the focus of Goode's work and yet he maintains that family systems as a whole cannot be reduced to a unit of parents and their biological children (1963:70). Reduction is impossible because even in nuclear family units, individual members are tied to other units and larger conjugal families through common members.<sup>220</sup> This tying of other units together is what was indicated in the woman's thoughts above when she linked her natal nuclear family to her nuclear family.

Despite the interweaving connections of families, some scholars such as David Popenoe (1995), and texts such as "The Proclamation" treat the nuclear family as a skeletal structure that interacts with society. Popenoe disregards conjugal family systems (what he refers to as tribal) as a thing of the past (71). On the other hand, writers like family historian Stephanie Coontz claims that our ideas about nuclear families are based on nostalgia and "myths about family forms" (2000 [1992]; 1997:xiv) rather than the current or past lived experience of family.

Coontz stated that what we refer to as "traditional" or nuclear families are actually a qualitatively new phenomenon (2000 [1992]:25). Coontz observed that some are wistfully nostalgic about the 1950s when it appeared that it was possible for workers to earn a living wage, and life felt more predictable (1997:33). The LDS Church rhetoric not only fuels that nostalgic vision of family, but also promises followers that it can be a reality, even though statistically, it is

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<sup>219</sup> This is one area where we can see that Goode was writing at the cusp of social change brought about in the 1960s. Part of that social change was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (the same year Goode's second book was published) which outlawed racial discrimination. Some of the now shocking thoughts about race are reflected in Goode's discussion of independent households. Goode states that "most young people set up their own households at marriage. This is less likely for young black women who bear illegitimate children without marrying, and who are more likely to continue living with their relatives" (Goode, 1982 [1964]:69).

<sup>220</sup> I found many examples of this in my research. For instance, the husband in one nuclear family, maintains social relations (e.g. celebrating holidays together, visiting on a regular basis, etc.) with his sister who has her own family, and neither the brother nor the sister are living in their original family unit with their parents who are now grandparents.

not.<sup>221</sup> Coontz reminded us that we mistook the television sitcoms of the 1950s like “Ozzie and Harriet”<sup>222</sup> for reality, forgetting that fewer than ten percent of American families in the 1950s had a breadwinner father, a full-time homemaker mother, and dependent children living in a single-family home (2000 [1992]: 23-27). A 2013 Pew Report “Bread Winner Moms” shows that currently a record 40% of all households with children under the age of 18 have a mother who is either the sole or primary source of income for the family (Wang, Parker, and Taylor, 2013). We also seem to have forgotten that in the early 1900s before child labor laws, children made up nearly a quarter of the work-force in the textile mills and children as young as six or seven worked twelve-hour shifts in mines and factories (2000 [1992]: 13).

Our current ideal of family is actually a product of long historical transformation. It was not until as late as the mid-twentieth century that the modern family, and what we usually think of as the traditional family pattern, emerged and become normative enough to appear as natural, universal, and self-evident (Stacey, 1996:41). In fact, what we consider to be the American family has been undergoing major structural changes, such as family size and divorce rates, for several generations now. Trends in marriage and divorce as well as birth rates have dramatically changed the structure of families since the 1920s (Parsons and Bales, 1955:3-6; Mintz and Kellogg, 1987:203-04; Rice, 1994; Kennedy and Fitch, 2012). For instance due to declining birth rates, current family size is about half of what it was in the 1950s or 1960s. Such trends in family structures continue, yet now include a wider variety of variables affecting the family unit such as trends in the labor market, globalization and immigration (Cherlin, 2010).

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<sup>221</sup> The fact that this is not the reality for most Mormons may be a cause of the high rates of depression in LDS women (Bergin, Payne, Jenkins & Cornwall, 2001 [1994]:142).

<sup>222</sup> “Ozzie and Harriet” was popular television sitcom which ran from 1952 to 1966 and featured an idealistic white, middle-class American family. This sitcom gave American audiences a nostalgic standard for the quintessential breadwinner-homemaker ‘traditional family’ which has been curiously persistent long past the life of the sitcom.

Cohabitation, blended families and same-sex unions are among the variables that contribute to changing structures and demographics in American families today (Cherlin, 2010). These trends in American families can also be found in LDS families. Sociologist Tim Heaton's 1998 study, "Vital Statistics," found that "the idealized vision of a family with a husband and a wife married in the temple and children present describes only one out of five LDS families in the United States" (127). Heaton found that information from four other countries suggests that "the household composition of the LDS membership is diverse" (ibid). The fact that Heaton's study was done in 1998 indicates that this is not a new trend, but, as Cherlin suggests, part of ongoing changing structure in American families. In an earlier article, Heaton stated that due to a number of factors (such as small samplings, question wording, and data gathering procedures) make it very difficult to compare Mormons with national norms (1992:21). Despite this fact, the LDS Church continues to uphold an ideal that reflects fewer and fewer families. One transformational change that is gaining acceptance in society, but not in the LDS Church is that of same sex families and their children.

Previous national voter response to same sex marriage bills would indicate that Americans did not support anything outside of a heterosexual model, yet a 1990 *Newsweek* poll showed that 3 out of 4 people defined family as "a group of people who love and care for each other" (Stacey, 1996:9). Brian Powell's 2010 work, *Counted Out: Same-Sex Relations and Americans' Definitions of Family*, reported that in 2003 when considering the living arrangement of two men with children, 53.6 % of those surveyed said that unit counts as a family whereas in 2006 that number rose to 58.9% (2010:29).

Despite this growing acceptance in the U.S. general public, the LDS Church holds fast to the heteronormative model of family. Three months ahead of the Supreme Court vote on whether

to uphold the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), the LDS Church issued a statement declaring “we firmly support the divinely appointed definition of marriage as the union between a man and a woman because it is the single most important institution for strengthening children, families, and society” (CJCLDS, 2013c). When both DOMA and Proposition 8 were overturned on June 26, 2013, the Church again reaffirmed its stance on marriage and expressed concern and dismay over the rulings. A spokesman for the Church stated that: “regardless of the court decision, the Church remains irrevocably committed to strengthening traditional marriage between a man and a woman, which for thousands of years has proven to be the best environment for nurturing children ” (CJCLDS, 2013d).

One has to wonder if LDS officials have forgotten not only American history, but their own history as well. Early Mormons practiced polygamy, marriage between a man and several women, between 1852 and 1896; a practice that was seen as well outside traditional norms by the larger society. Although, usually seen as an advantage for men, such marriages had some advantages for women. Plural marriage “immediately connected women to established kinship ties, gave them social status, and entitled them to economic support” (Bowman, 2012:131).

Family defined as a group of people who love and care for each other could be seen as a postmodern description of family in a pluralistic society. Postmodern families often contain complex patterns of family structure as a result of divorce, remarriage, and step-kinship (Stacey, 1996:18). These families are not static and have a tendency to blend together previously dismantled families to sustain cooperative kin ties. Current trends in postmodern definitions of family are continuing to expand in order to adapt to changing patterns in family ties.<sup>223</sup>

A 2011 study “Perspectives on Extended Family and Fictive Kin in the Later Years: Strategies and Meanings of Kin Reinterpretation” conducted by human development scientists

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<sup>223</sup> See Stacey, 1996.

Katherine R. Allen, Rosemary Blieszner, and Karen A. Roberto, found that alterations to kin classification helps adults adapt to the transient elements of family ties (Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2011). The study found five strategies of kin reinterpretation: kin retention (keeping an ex-in-law in the family network), kin promotion (e.g. promoting a wife's sister's daughter to granddaughter), kin exchange (e.g. reclassifying a sister as a mother), nonkin conversion (turning friends into family-like members), and kin loss (e.g. loss of contact with a once-valued kin member) (1156).

I found instances of all of these types of kin reinterpretation in those I interviewed; the most common was non-kin conversion. I found that many of those I spoke with in New Jersey had converted their fellow congregants into family-like members because they had moved far away from their family and the local ward members became their local family. In Utah I also found similar cases, yet I also found that even when individuals had family members in the area, they still had a tendency to accept at least one person in the congregation as a family-like member. One young couple told me that they did have family in another part of the state, but they liked knowing they had a *ward family* that they could turn to for help if needed. In the Salt Lake ward one elderly woman (in her mid-90s) seemed to be accepted as the grandmother of the entire congregation. She had a remarkable ability to remember the names of her fellow congregants who were always visibly happy to see her. Whenever the elderly woman spoke in a Church meeting everyone seemed to be a bit more attentive—everyone seemed to enjoy hearing her tell about her childhood and the adventures of living on a ranch in the Northwest. I remember one Sunday during testimony meeting she stood up from her place in the pews and was making her way to the pulpit so she could share her testimony with the congregation. Before she even got to the front of the chapel two young congregants (one teenage boy and a man in his

early 30s) were by her side to help her make her way up the couple of steps leading to the pulpit. Since there are no assigned ushers in LDS congregations I knew that these men were acting on their own, they saw a possible need of assistance and were on hand to offer it.

So while LDS congregations are like any other congregation—a collection of families, I wondered how deeply Mormons internalized the non-kin conversion of fellow congregants, or if another type of kin reinterpretation was going on--perhaps kin extension. Could Mormons be extending their kinship networks by adding fellow congregants as a new type of kin member? I suspected that LDS wards were becoming a special kinship network in this way, but in order to explore that element of entextualization I had to understand how Mormons approached kinship networks in general.

### Kinship Networks

It could be said that *The Book of Mormon* is a collection of stories about families and kinship. The LDS scripture opens with the line: “I Nephi, having been born of goodly parents” and the entire book reflects themes of family and belonging.<sup>224</sup> Of course it could be said that the Bible is also a book of similar themes, but it seems to take on a more personal note within Mormonism.

LDS Church founder Joseph Smith seemed to crave kinship more than anything else. Mormon history records very little about Smith’s extended family (aunts, cousins, etc.) although we do know that his father and mother joined him as he built his church. The creation of temple ceremonies, that would bind families together and help bring salvation to deceased ancestors, underscores Smith’s preoccupation with family and kinship networks; today’s Mormons are no different. For Mormons, kinship, kinship networks, and extended families that include past,

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<sup>224</sup> I have heard Mormons joke that since many people set an annual goal of reading the *Book of Mormon* cover to cover, yet do not always accomplish that goal, that opening line in the *Book of Mormon* is the most read and most recognized sentence of LDS scripture.

present, and future generations are all part of their collective culture. As anthropologist Marshall Sahlins argued in his 1984 *What Kinship Is—And Is Not*, kinship is culture, not biology (2013 [1984]:62). Kinship is constructed through relations of being, and by regarding others as kin. Kin is a negotiated relationship that includes the idea of kin being re-contextualized in the social context of community (Carsten, 2003; Butler, 2004).

With only very rare exceptions, every conversation I have had with Mormons about their families includes conversations about extended kinship networks. For instance, the conversation I had with a woman in her late 90s included warm references to her parents, siblings, grandparents, children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, despite the fact she had not seen some of them for decades. “I remember my husband telling me about how his father wanted to leave Slovenia because he didn’t want to be in the service. So, when he was about 24 he walked to France”<sup>225</sup> (that would have been in the late 1800s or early 1900s).

LDS stories of kin often include paranormal elements. Deceased ancestors and living LDS decedents have active relationships. The matriarch’s story continued: “My youngest daughter never knew her older brother; he died before she was born. But, we told her about him and we were all sealed together in the temple.”<sup>226</sup> She said that to find out she had a perfect brother has made a difference in her life.”<sup>227</sup> During the interview it was obvious that despite having been without her parents, brother, husband, and one child for many years, the emotional bonds of kinship were still strong.

Sociologist Lynn Davidman’s work “Motherloss” considers the maintenance of emotional bonds, and indeed this woman is referencing an experience that would fit with

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<sup>225</sup> Personal interview conducted July 31, 2012.

<sup>226</sup> Someone filled in for the deceased brother during the sealing ceremony. I imagine that having a living person stand in for her older brother in the ceremony made the deceased sibling more real to the young girl.

<sup>227</sup> Mormons believe that people are perfected after death.

Davidman's analysis, although no mother loss was mentioned *per se* (2000). The LDS framing of maintaining bonds of kinship varies slightly from Davidman's findings. For Mormons, the focus is not so much on the loss of a family member, but on the temporary absence. Performing temple ritual where a living person stands in proxy for absent family members adds to the process of kinship bond maintenance.

Émile Durkheim noted that kinship bonds are not always common blood relations but rather relations regarded as family or kin through reciprocal obligations of help, vengeance, and so forth (1995 [1912]: 100). Artificial (socially constructed) kinships could be formed through something as simple as the ritual sharing of a sacrificial meal, it is cultural (*ibid*: 341). Sahlins stated that people "become a relative" (2013:62) through reciprocal cooperation. Both Durkheim and Sahlins are pointing to the process of socialization within the structure of kinship. Although carried out by individuals, the enacted practices of reciprocal obligations or cooperation take place within a collective (group). The continued practices of cooperation and assistance enables the actors to collectively construct a situated social reality—kinship.

Conversely, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski disagreed with Durkheim's approach which is oriented toward action rather than emotional bonds. Malinowski (2006 [1909]) felt that the strong bonds between parent and child were overlooked by Durkheim's analysis and needed to be included in a fuller definition of kinship. Given that kinship is very complicated socially and psychologically, Malinowski's work tried to unravel the intricate and interwoven aspects of kinship. His ideas and interpretations of how family arrangements are defined by a collective agreement on social function and social rules regarding family help us see how the family unit functions in a larger collective group. He stressed that emotional ties are an important element in parental relationships and that there is an "intimate connection between the ideas determining



kinship and the feelings bound up with it (Malinowski, 2006 [1909]:197). Social anthropologist Marilyn Strathern agreed to a point. While she agreed that intimate connections in family arrangements aid in determining kinship, Strathern challenged the idea of “parent” (2011).

Strathern (2011) stated that most ideas about emotional ties in parental relationships are Euro-American understandings about the terms themselves. She pointed to the fact that in Euro-American ways of thinking, the term parent is relative. One becomes a parent through the act of having a child, and to have a parent points to an origin in another person. This last point is especially interesting when applied to Mormonism and the LDS doctrine of divine parentage. When the emotional ties of parental relationships include a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother kinship is expanded to all of humankind. In addition to emotional and cultural bonds then, one must also consider religious contexts.

The term “kinship” is used in religious contexts in various ways to highlight a sense of belonging. A fairly recent example can be found in John Wimber’s (a founding pastor in the Vineyard movement) name for small groups or “kinships” as the core of the organization.<sup>228</sup> Kinships were not actual kin, but small groups of people who meet during the week to focus on the Gospel and talk about God (Luhmann, 2012:30). In another contemporary context, Dr. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, a well-loved theologian and ethicist at Drew University, helped popularize the term “God’s kin-dom” (in place of the hierarchal term “God’s Kingdom”) in her *Mujerista* theology. Isasi-Diaz was emphasizing a kin-dom, or family of God, to reflect the core Christian concepts of fellowship, generosity and equality (2010).

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<sup>228</sup> John Wimber (1934-1998) graduated from Azusa Pacific University and was ordained in 1970 by the California Yearly Meeting of Friends. He served as co-pastor at Yorba Linda Friends Church for five years before splitting from the Quaker Church and moving into a role as church growth consultant with the Fuller Evangelistic Association. In 1977 he established the Anaheim Vineyard (the first in the vineyard movement, a neocharismatic Evangelical Christian denomination) which launched his career as a public speaker and his efforts as a church planter (Burgess, 2002:1199-1200).

Inherent in this idea of Christian fellowship is a feeling of solidarity. Malinowski stated that a feeling of solidarity allows kin to regard themselves as a part of a bigger whole, "...one body whereof each unit is more than metaphorically a member, a limb" (2006 [1909]:201). He concluded that establishing "family" consists of more than the sexual reproductive function of marriage; it extends past consanguinity to include the category of *kinship* (205). As mentioned above, for Mormons, that kinship includes divine parents.

### **Gender Roles**

Given that in Mormon theology, God (and God's wife), have gendered bodies, the topic of gender roles takes on a new level of importance within the LDS Church. Inherent in the nostalgic, and often historically inaccurate, view of the "traditional" family, are distinct gender roles. Relationships between marriage partners and between parents and children are distinctly gendered in nuclear family models. Fathers were expected to derive their identity from their work. Mothers were expected to stay at home, bearing and nurturing children. Overall there is a general acceptance of domesticity which was a mark of middle-class status and a sign of success and stability (Coontz, 2000 [1992]:28).

Both of these elements, gender roles and implicit domesticity, are points of concern for some like sociologist Marie Cornwall and economist Carrie Miles, when considering Mormonism and the family (Cornwall, 2001 [1994]; Miles, 2008). Specifically, they take offense to the fact that the Church strongly discouraged women from working outside the home. Keeping women at home essentially muted women's presence in the Church, reducing their role to the "smallest unit of church organization—the family" (Cornwall, 2001 [1994]:258). It also puts women in the difficult position of having to choose between adhering to the Church leaders' council, or meeting their families economic needs (Miles, 2008:129).

According to a 2011 religious identification survey "Mormons in the United States 1990-2008: Socio-Demographic Trends and Regional Differences. A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2008," conducted by Rick Phillips and Ryan Cragun, Mormon women are more likely to report being housewives than non-Mormon (6). In 2008 among Utah Mormon women, 32% reported that they were housewives, 22% of Mormons outside of Utah claimed that status, while only 13% of non-LDS women stated that they were housewives. These numbers may suggest, that overall, Mormons are more likely to agree with their leaders about the ideal family structure of a nuclear family with a stay-at-home mom. This may be because, as discussed in chapter four, Mormons view women working outside the home as a threat that weakens family units. Generally speaking I found that Mormons who have a difficult time acceding to the Church's defined gender roles, usually have issues with Church policies that dictate what men and women are allowed to do outside of the family unit and home. This stance against working women has been seen as a source of strain and conflict alienating members as well as potential converts (Iannaccone and Miles, 2001 [1994]:265).

Sociologist Laurence Iannaccone and economist Carrie Miles found that during the 1960s and 1970s, membership growth in the LDS church reflected how tightly the LDS Church held on to its position concerning the roles of women. They found that the Church's sluggish response to social change during those years "may have cost it (the Church) members" (281). While Iannaccone and Miles acknowledge that successful churches must strike a balance between accommodation and resistance, they believe that the LDS Church's shift toward accommodation was too slow and caused the Church to lose its power to convert new members (282-83).

Mormons, however, are not the only religious group to remain "traditionalist about gender roles" (Putnam and Campbell, 2010:241). Political scientists Robert Putnam and David

Campbell found that although deeply religious American attitudes towards maintaining strict gender roles had fallen since 1975, their attitudes were still more traditionalist than their secular counterparts (ibid:240-41). Putnam and Campbell's figures showed that in 1977 sixty-one percent of religious women thought that it was more important to support a husband's career than to have one of their own, and by 2000 that number had dropped to twenty-five percent. Similarly in 1975 seventy percent of regular churchgoers said it was better for men to achieve in a career and for women to tend to the home while in 2010 forty-five percent held that belief (2010:240).

So, while people surveyed in 2010 were more willing to accept women working outside the home than their counterparts were in 1975, a large part of them still felt it was better for a woman to be at home. This may be due to the fact that more women (religious and secular) were working outside the home than they were several decades ago. Looking at women's entry into the paid workforce Putnam and Campbell show that from 1973 to 2008 highly religious women and secular women entered the workforce at about the same rate rising from about 40% in 1973 to 56% in 2008 (2010:237-38).

By the 1970s more and more women had to go to work to help support their families and the Church began notice that those women who had to work were judged harshly by their LDS sisters and as a result felt guilty about working (Mauss, 1994:135). In response, the Church began to soften its stance a bit and declared that financial hardship was a valid reason for a woman to work outside the home. Although the stance softened over the next twenty years, the strict gender roles remained.

"The Proclamation," published in 1995, asserts that gender is an innate characteristic which defines one's identity and purpose in life. Specifically the document states that "gender is

an essential characteristic of individual premortal (sic), mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” (CJCLDS, 1995). So while Mormons women are able to work outside the home without as much backlash, their identity is still directly related to the domestic sphere. These Church sanctioned roles of motherhood first linked gender to Church and familial roles in a 1954 revision of Apostle John A Widtsoe’s book *Priesthood and Church Government*.

In the early days of the Church women were ordained into certain callings such as the Relief Society president, and were given the power of the priesthood to give blessings aimed at healing. In the early 1900s these blessings were limited to administering to other women, especially in childbirth, or their own children. By 1921, statements on women’s authority became increasingly narrowed when women began to be told that they were not to receive the priesthood for themselves. No explanation was given for this narrowing of women’s authority and no official document was issued justifying the lessening of women’s roles. Without an official statement declaring that the change was due to new revelation, many speculated that it was a personal choice of leaders of the time and therefore an element of procedure rather than an edit from God.<sup>229</sup> As such, it was left up to the individual local leaders who may or may not have been continuing to allow women some access to priesthood authority (Newell, 1992:38-42). Most recently the Church Handbook stated that “only Melchizedek Priesthood holders may administer to the sick or afflicted” (CJCLDS, 2010:174). This clearly excludes women from administering to the sick. Contrary to what the handbook officially states, I have heard one Church leader state that it is a woman’s right to administer to her children (meaning that she can give healing blessings to her children).<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> This is the point that LDS women in the “Ordain Women” movement point to – that women being denied the priesthood was a cultural and/or personal decision rather than a divinely inspired decision.

<sup>230</sup> This statement was made in a sermon given at a local ward meeting in Utah.

Widtsoe's 1954 book "Priesthood and Church Government" made a distinction between men and women stating that "God shall appoint and ordain over the Church, the Priesthood and its officers" (1954:38-39) yet clarifying that "woman has her gift of equal magnitude – motherhood" (89-90). This established priesthood as a male role, and motherhood as the counterpart female role. By disproportionately linking gender roles in this way, women are excluded from the priesthood and an identity as priestess and men are only defined as priest. So, while men are acknowledged as being fathers, their role as priesthood holder, not father, defines their identity (Farnsworth, 1992:300-01). For black men before 1978, they had no access to priesthood, so they had no official identity in the Church. It is much the same for women today. Women have no access to the priesthood, and only gain identity as a wife a mother; if they are single and/or have no children they too have no official identity in the Church.

The establishment of parental and Church roles: fathers as priesthood holders and providers who preside over their families and mothers who bear and nurture children, as the only indication of identity and purpose incites antagonism by many toward the Church and within the Church. For many it does not invite query and dialogue. For example, LDS feminist writers such as Sonja Farnsworth and Maxine Hanks pointed out that strict gender roles exclude women from the public sphere, enable the Church to blame women for society's ills, and portray women as spiritually inferior to men (Farnsworth, 1992; Hanks, 1992a; 1992b).

The 2012 "Wear Pants to Church" event which was meant to draw attention to rigid gender roles within the Church, not surprisingly, drew criticism and hostility from LDS opponents to the event. Salt Lake Tribune reporter Peggy Fletcher Stack stated that the organizers had hoped only to engage a civil dialogue about gender issues rather than provoke

antagonism toward themselves or the Church (2012d). It would be a mistake, however, to assume that it is only the male leaders in the Church that perpetuate restrictive gender roles.

At the April, 2013 General Conference the recently released (retired) Young Women's president, Elaine Dalton, gave a sermon titled "We Are Daughters of Our Heavenly Father" (2013).<sup>231</sup> In that sermon Dalton instructed Mormons to know who they are and what roles they have in "building the kingdom of God" (ibid).<sup>232</sup> She stated that women have strengths as mothers and nurturers of children and an important role in loving and supporting priesthood holding fathers and husbands. Dalton stated

Young women need mothers and mentors who exemplify virtuous womanhood. Mothers, your relationship with your daughter is of paramount importance, and so is your example. How you love an honor her father, his priesthood, and his divine role will be reflected and perhaps amplified in your daughter's attitudes and behavior (2013).

In her remarks, Dalton related a story about the construction of the Church's conference center, reminding her listeners that this was a "sacred space" (2013). She described how her husband was installing the carpet and the construction process had left a lot of dust; her part "was to vacuum. So I vacuumed and vacuumed and vacuumed. After three days my little vacuum burned up (ibid)!"

Dalton's narrative was meant to show that she was faithful in her duty and performing essential work. It is not difficult, however, to imagine that many women in the Church took offense to being reduced to the role of wife and mother and further diminished to doing domestic chores of cleaning up after the men. A blog entry on the website of *By Common Consent* (C.A., 2013) poked fun of Dalton sharing a vacuuming story and accused Dalton of being tone deaf to how messages delivered at conference are internalized by listeners. Some went far so as to say

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<sup>231</sup> The term "released" is used in Mormon circles to denote that the term of a calling has expired and the person is now "released" (excused, retired, dismissed) from that calling.

<sup>232</sup> The term "released" is used in Mormon circles to denote that the term of a calling has expired and the person is now "released" (excused, retired, dismissed) from that calling.

that when women are reduced to roles of obedience and submission it opens the doors for passive-aggressive behavior and even domestic violence (Stevens, 2013; Castleton, 1990).

Communications scholar, and Mormon, Anne Castleton described her personal experience with domestic violence. She talked about the way she felt that her family looked perfect from the outside, yet the reality was far from perfect. She felt that the LDS culture made it too easy for her husband to rationalize his abusive behavior (1990:98). Castleton stated that domestic violence is more common in cultures in which patriarchal ideology with strict gender roles is more prevalent (92-93); Coontz called this tendency a distortion of traditional roles (2000, [1992]:279-80). Such role distortion can have serious consequences for women. Castleton claimed that Mormon women suffer from domestic violence as often, or perhaps even more so due to strong patriarchal ideology and strict gender roles, as other women in U.S. society (1990:92-93). Sociologist Nancy Nason-Clark suggested that many religious women, whose beliefs are enforced by an ideology that sees the women's role as wife and mother, may find it harder to leave an abusive marriage, and that they are more vulnerable when abused (2004:304).

In the course of doing fieldwork and attending women's meetings, I heard the elderly female teachers (women in their 70s) tell the women attending a meeting that they should stay with their husbands "no matter what."<sup>233</sup> Given the age of the speakers it could be that the two women were just as much a product of their times (they would have been in their twenties in the late 1950s) as a product of their LDS culture. Still, given that no one challenged the remarks may have left some thinking that leaving an abusive relationship was not an option. Conversely, I also had women tell me privately how grateful they were that somewhere in their past, a bishop had told them to "run, don't just walk away"<sup>234</sup> from an abusive relationship. I also heard stories

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<sup>233</sup> Field notes dated March 28, 2013.

<sup>234</sup> Personal conversation dated June 18, 2012.



from women in a group of domestic violence survivors say how their faith in the Church helped them through difficult years of abuse.

Overall, in my time with the Mormons I have found that the majority of both men and women take little or no offense to the Church's establishment of gender roles within the family. Many see that establishing such roles gives them cogent parameters within which they can construct and maintain a family unit of their own. One young man in his early thirties, married with two children stated:

So many times people think you have the big wedding then drive off blissfully into the sunset. And, what happens is the wheels fall off, the horse runs away, and the carriage catches on fire. But learning lessons, talking about how you can improve your marriage, hearing someone who has gone through a lot of struggles, and still thinks his wife is awesome, that helps. It's learning how to improve your family, be a better father, better husband.<sup>235</sup>

As this interview quote illustrates, for Mormons gender roles are marriage roles, especially for women. LDS women are told repeatedly that their most sacred role is that of mother and wife, and as mentioned earlier, for most LDS women that meant being married. For men or women gender roles as codified in Church publications such as "The Proclamation" are familial roles. In the section above I have discussed some of the ways these roles are points of concern and may have either cost the Church membership or slowed Church growth. In the section that follows I will discuss elements of marriage in more depth and look at ways the division of labor affects Mormon marriages.

## **Marriage**

Discussions about family and gender roles naturally lead us to consider marriage customs. Sociologist and historian Armand Mauss states that "Mormons profess a special proclivity for marriage, especially within their own religious fold (endogamy)" (1994:56).

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<sup>235</sup> Personal interview dated July 26, 2012.

Perhaps this is due to the fact that religious socialization plays a big role in retention. Putnam and Campbell (2010) assert that those who grow up in religiously homogeneous and observant homes are more likely to remain religious. Growing up in a mixed faith home is more likely to produce “nones” (religiously unaffiliated); and marrying someone of a different faith increases the likelihood of leaving one’s original religion (Putnam and Campbell, 2010:142-43).<sup>236</sup> As a whole, however, Mormons are less likely than any other religious group to switch religious traditions from the tradition of their parents (138), and are more likely to marry someone of their faith (156). For example a little over fifty percent of Mormons said that it is important that their children marry someone of their own faith. Jews and Evangelical Protestant groups were the second highest with a little over thirty percent opposing inter-religious marriage, and the lowest was Mainline Protestant at just over ten percent (155). Perhaps the figure for Mormons is so high because overall Mormons place a great emphasis on marriage and, as noted above, are more likely to be married than other Americans.

Mormons feel that not only is marriage a duty, but it is divinely ordained. “The Proclamation” (CJCLDS, 1995) provides very strict gender roles within the family unit, as well as a statement about marriage:

The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity (CJCLDS, 1995).

Studies done in the late 1990s found that the religiosity of Mormon men and women increased after marriage. BYU religious studies scholar James T. Duke and Barry L. Johnson attribute this

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<sup>236</sup> “Nones” are religiously unaffiliated, but not necessarily un-religious/secular. Around 1990, the rate of those who self-identified as “none” or “nothing in particular” took a sharp rise. Putnam and Campbell state this is driven by generational factors. Increasing numbers of nones are directly correlated to decade in which the respondent reached adulthood. These are national trends rather than regional although there are statistics that show young evangelicals are declining at the same time young nones are increasing (Putnam and Campbell, 2010:121-125).

increase to Church teachings. Duke and Johnson stated that “devotion is a consequence of love, devotion, caring, service, and sacrifice, all of which are more likely to be practiced in a close relationship with a loved spouse” (1998:331-32) and speculates that single people are more self-centered.<sup>237</sup> In this sense one begins to see how not only religiosity, but social status increases with marriage, and how being single is disparaged. Another way of considering marriage rates and religiosity is to consider that with marriage the costs of leaving the Church are higher.

As mentioned briefly above, the heteronormative nuclear model of family within the LDS Church has not always been the prescribed form. The nature of marriage has been redefined at least twice since the Church’s inception. The first was the practice of being “adopted” into the lineage of Abraham was through temple sealings (temple marriage) (Bowman, 2012:83-85).<sup>238</sup> The second was polygamy which was officially practiced by Mormons between the years of 1852 and 1896.

It may surprise readers to discover that in a tradition that is so focused on family, issues of marriage were what Thomas O’Dea named as the “second most important source of strain for Mormons” in the 1800s and early 1900s (1957:245).<sup>239</sup> O’Dea was referring to the practice of plural marriage. He saw that polygamy was a problem especially for women as their previous ideas about marriage and family forms left them ill-equipped to adapt to polygamous life.

Sociologist, family therapist, and Mormon Larry Langlois (1984) found just the opposite; he went so far as to call polygamy “empowering.” In his 1984 dissertation "Mormons and the Family" Langlois noted that polygamy was “empowering” for Mormon women as no woman was forced into singlehood. He argued that since all family units were linked in a patrilineal

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<sup>237</sup> This last point illustrates how single Mormons are not only ignored, or overlooked, but often actually looked down upon and respected less than their married counterparts.

<sup>238</sup> Discussed in chapter five.

<sup>239</sup> The first is the peculiar nature of Mormonism and its conflict with modern secular thought (O’Dea, 1957:222).

lineage system as an order of heaven, “polygamy was a simple and logical way of assuring that all women had the opportunity to enter this lineage system in a marital unit” (Langlois, 1984:45). Other scholars would disagree with Langlois’s generous portrayal of polygamy as empowering to Mormon women. Historian Fawn Brodie relates a story about Joseph Smith’s first wife Emma beating a “sister wife” with a broom after she caught her and her husband in an embrace (1995:345).<sup>240</sup> Perhaps more compelling is that on the whole, Americans felt polygamy was not only morally wrong, but criminally wrong, and Utah would not be allowed statehood while its citizens were practicing polygamists.

The Edmunds Act of 1882 made the practice of polygamy punishable by a \$500 fine and up to five years in prison (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:402).<sup>241</sup> Having polygamy declared illegal by the government, yet a practice sanctioned by the Church posed a difficult dilemma for many Utah Mormons. Some chose to continue the practice and became “prisoners for conscience’ sake in the territorial penitentiary for their refusal to abandon their religious principles” (415).<sup>242</sup> Others chose to obey the law of the land thinking that “the better part of valor was to obey the constitutional law of the land and agree to give up their plural wives” (404) while others chose to go into hiding. Wives that were left behind continued to live in their homes and tend the farms.

Laws against polygamy still stand, although some like Utah polygamist Kody Brown challenged them by taking his case before the courts in a fight for religious freedom (Hagerty,

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<sup>240</sup> A term used to refer to a fellow plural wife.

<sup>241</sup> This was difficult for Mormons who saw this act as an act of aggression by the government for interfering in their religious practices. It is still a sore point for many Mormons whose ancestors were either imprisoned or fled from Utah in order to avoid imprisonment. My paternal great grandfather, William Morley Black, was a polygamist who had six wives and was among those who fled to Mexican territory for a number of years to avoid going to jail.

<sup>242</sup> Only the men were charged with unlawful cohabitation, yet some women were sent to prison for refusing to testify against their husbands. Between 1884 and 1893 more than 1,000 Mormon men were charged with polygamy (Allen & Leonard, 1992 [1976]:405).

2011).<sup>243</sup> Of course, painting with such broad brush strokes as claiming that polygamy was either empowering or enraging to *all* women would be a mistake, just as saying that all polygamists or those living in polyamorous families are acting on religious principles. Regardless, polygamy is an historical aspect of the LDS Church that today's Mormons still have to confront on some level. Whether it is responding to questions concerning television shows like “Big Love” or being asked how many mothers you had growing up.<sup>244</sup> Mormons and other residents of Utah are still dealing with this peculiar part of the Church's and Utah's history. This history may also be the reason that nuclear family models of marriage and family are so emphasized—to dispel any residual prejudice against that early Mormon practice of polygamy.

### **Human Family and Divine Parents**

Although this section deals with LDS doctrine about divine parents and their nascent human family, I include it here to underscore the way that Mormons see how individual family units connect with larger kinship networks and ideas of a Heavenly Father and Heavenly mother.

From the discussion above it is evident that Mormons find marriage to be crucially important for themselves; they also find it important for their God. The LDS hymn #292 “O My Father” written by Eliza R. Snow in 1845 contains the following verse:

In the heavens are parents single?  
No, the thought makes reason stare!  
Truth is reason, truth eternal,  
Tells me I've a Mother there.<sup>245</sup>

Heavenly parentage is not unique to Mormon thought, nor is the idea that we are all “God's children.” Being a child of God is a common theme among many Christian traditions. In LDS

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<sup>243</sup> Kody Brown and his four wives is the polygamous family that were featured on the TLC channel's reality television show “Sister Wives” which first aired in September, 2010. See IMDB web page <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1721666/> accessed July 13, 2013.

<sup>244</sup> In 2007 I actually had a person in New Jersey ask me this question when he discovered I grew up in Utah.

<sup>245</sup> Eliza was the sister of Lorenzo Snow, the fifth prophet/president of the LDS Church from 1898-1901.

contexts however, it takes on a different tone. Mormons believe that God has a body which was once mortal like our own (Davies, 2000:118).<sup>246</sup> The human bodies we have now are homes for spirit-children, created by divine parents, and are vehicles for humankind's eternal progress (ibid).<sup>247</sup>

Malinowski showed that positive ideas about kinship have underlying social functions, such as group motherhood modes of communal living. His discussion of collective ideas around conception and reincarnation are surprisingly applicable in Mormon contexts. Malinowski referred to Spencer and Gillen's (1899, vol. I:265) findings that the Australian aborigines believed that sexual intercourse prepared the mother for the "reception and birth of an already formed spirit-child" (Malinowski, 2006 [1909]:211). In this case the child is directly connected to the totem center inhabited by the spirit-children, and by extension the totemic tribe. While Mormons do not believe intercourse prepares them for reception and birth, they do believe that their children are pre-formed spirit-children. These children are formed from the union of a God father and God mother. In the case of Mormonism, then, the child is directly connected to the Godly parents as well as the earthly parents. All people therefore become spirit brothers and sisters in God. While Australian groups believe that kin are often reincarnated family members (Malinowski, 2006 [1909]:223-4), and Mormons do not believe in reincarnation, both groups form the ground of certain types of kinship on a previous life that both exists prior to this life and extends beyond it. Ultimately Malinowski concluded that the family is an object of set and well-determined categorical, collective ideas (2006 [1909]:293). In the sections above I have shown

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<sup>246</sup> For further reading on the implications of body symbolism see Mary Douglas's 1982 work *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*.

<sup>247</sup> As mentioned in chapter five, this is the point where Mormons as "god-makers" enters according to teaching of the fifth LDS Church president, Lorenzo Snow. Snow taught that "as man now is, God once was; as God is now man may be" (Williams, 1984:1).

how Mormons have a well-determined idea of family, but the inclusion of shared spiritual lineage allows the set of kinship to expand to include a larger human family.

For Mormons, being a child of God is not simply a metaphor, but the belief that we are all literal spirit-children of divine parents. Mormon and Historian Terryl Givens stated that not only is God a figurative father, “but his literal role as the Father of all human spirits made the universal brotherhood of man a truth that extended for Mormons into an infinite past in which the entire human family jointly inhabited the same primeval world” (2007:57). The inclusion of a Mother-God as an equally important co-creator in spirit-children adds another dimension of the importance of family life and family bonds in both temporal and eternal worlds. Divine parentage may be the unifying thread in the web of human relationships.

Joseph Smith had a vision of heaven being “constructed out of a web of human relationships that extends infinitely in every direction” (Givens, 2007:57). He established scripture and temple ritual to legitimize and reinforce this concept. The scriptural reference Smith established on April 2, 1843 is found in the *Doctrine and Covenants* section 130:2 which reads: “And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be couples with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy.” The sociality Smith was referring to was family, extended kinship networks, and the larger community of humankind. He expected that covenants of love and mutual friendship among Mormons would link friends to friends in a congregation of a restored church (Givens, 2007:57).

In all of these things Smith saw that all of humankind was bound together as descendants of Adam “in a vast family tree” (ibid). In short, we all belong to a great human family that ultimately encompasses everyone including God himself (Brown, 2012:204). This ideal is still reflected in Mormons’ worldviews. One college student told me: “we are all brothers and sisters

and part of a larger family just as people on the earth. It's almost like you feel like the ward becomes your family and the friends in it become your family and just with the goal of working together to help each other like a family would."<sup>248</sup>

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at broad ideas about family and kinship networks in order to illuminate how Mormons think about family, extended kinship networks, gender roles, marriage, the human family, and theology and doctrine about family. Although the codified model of family as put forth in "The Proclamation" lays down strict gender roles, and a narrow model of family, other LDS doctrine and previous practices includes expansive ideas of family such as polygamy, and the idea of a human family. All of these are structures and ideals that undergird and legitimate a particular model of family.

Mormon identity is shaped by the construction of actual family units as well as the Church sanctioned model which legitimizes family. Church rhetoric such as "The Proclamation" supports the nuclear heteronormative model consisting of husband, wife and biological offspring as the only approved construction of family. The model Nuclear or traditional family is a qualitatively new phenomenon. It may be the result of a nostalgic vision of family that grew out of the 1950s. It is a model of family that is not statistically prevalent in society and becoming less so in the Church. The lived experience of most Mormons varies from that model, for instance, Mormons divorce at the same rate as their other American counterparts, and their ideas of family are much more capacious. When adult Mormons think about their nuclear family they often link their natal nuclear family with their own family, which is actually a kinship network rather than a nuclear family.

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<sup>248</sup> Personal interview dated august 10, 2012.



The structure of family has a long history of transformation. Currently three out of four people define family as a group of people who love and care for each other. In 2010 nearly 60% of people surveyed said two men with children fits their definition of family. Despite a growing acceptance of same sex families, the LDS Church holds fast to their heteronormative model of family and rails against laws aimed at establishing equality in marriage (same sex marriage). Defending their stance on marriage as a morals issue, the Church seems to have forgotten its own history of polygamy which was well outside of moral norms of its time; so much so that Utah was not permitted to gain statehood status until the LDS Church had officially ceased the practice of polygamy.

Inherent within the LDS idea of nuclear family are gender roles. For many Mormons gender is an innate characteristic which defines one's identity and purpose in life. Men are defined as priesthood holders and providers who preside over their families and women are mothers who bear and nurture children. Mormons are not the only religious group to relegate women's identity to the domestic sphere. Other conservative religious groups frown upon women having careers of their own and hold that it is more important for women to support a husband in his career than for women have one of their own. Although Mormon women are able to work outside the home without as much backlash as their sisters in the past, their identity is still directly related to the domestic sphere. One of the perils of reducing the role and identity of women to the home is that it puts women in submissive rather than empowered positions in both the home and the Church.

Mormon ideas of kinship groups include acts of kin reinterpretation. The most common type reinterpretation is non-kin conversion. Temple ceremonies help Mormons think of kinship networks as extended families consisting of past present and future generations. Death in the

family is viewed as a temporary absence rather than a loss. Emotional bonds that extend beyond the temporal family also extend to an idea of divine parentage. For Mormons, being a child of God is not simply a metaphor, but the belief that we are all literal spirit-children of divine parents. God is literal father figure which creates a universal brotherhood of humankind. Mother in heaven as a co-creator in the human family adds a dimension of the importance of family life and family bonds in both the temporal and eternal worlds. Divine parentage may be the unifying thread in the web of human relationships, and the foundation for a capacious idea of family.

## Chapter Seven: Care: Social Instances of Care

### Hymn #224: I Have Work Enough to Do<sup>249</sup>

*“Well ma’am, you’ll find that that’s what our religion is, it is kindness.”<sup>250</sup> This statement has been attributed to Joseph Smith and was related to me by a young man in his early twenties. Judging by the frequency with which he referenced his remarks with scripture and Church history, he seemed to be a voracious reader with a keen interest in the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith. He is a BYU graduate and often teaches Sunday school classes in Church doctrine. While discussing the LDS Church’s emphasis on service to others, he told me of the exchange Joseph Smith was reported to have had with an unidentified woman. The woman was commenting to Smith how much she appreciated his kindness and the quote above was his reply.<sup>251</sup>*

As psychologists Kathryn A. Johnson, Adam B. Cohen, and Morris A. Okun (2013) point out, “people practice what is preached” (850); and when service is preached, care for others is practiced. The story above presents Smith’s interpretation of religion as kindness. It points to the way that Mormons see works (acts of service, care, and kindness) as a central part of their religion.<sup>252</sup> Care is at the heart of my model of the symbolic system of family, and at the heart of how Mormons think about family, kinship, and community. The goal of this chapter is to illustrate how care is the thread that binds all of these previously discussed elements together. More specifically, I will discuss how Mormons think about and codify care in terms of family and community.

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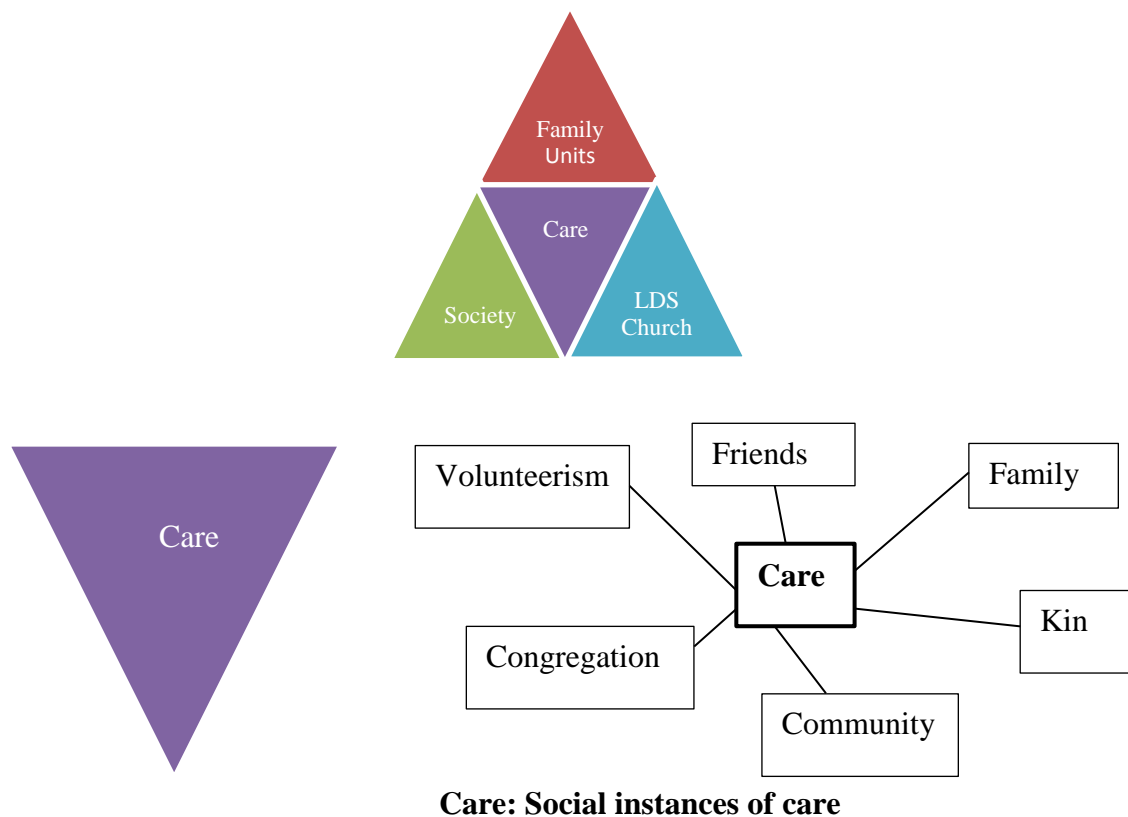
<sup>249</sup> This hymn is one that the Salt Lake ward sang frequently. It is a lively tune with lyrics about serving self, kindred, and God. It reflects the idea that serving others is service to God. It’s upbeat tempo and lyrics indicate there is a sense of cheerfulness in performing work and service for others.

<sup>250</sup> I was unable to find the source of this quote which the interviewee attributed to Smith. While the quote can be found on several blog pages such as “Good Reads” <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/264916-kindness-is-our-religion>, the original source is undocumented. I have personally heard similar versions of this quote, i.e. “my religion is kindness” attributed to the Dalai Lama, Buddha, and Jesus Christ, but those too are undocumented sources. My guess is that since charity has been named as a moral attribute/virtue as far back as Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*) many religious leaders incorporate some tenant of charity (kindness towards others) in their discourse.

<sup>251</sup> Personal interview conducted July 26, 2012.

<sup>252</sup> “Works” is a term used by Mormons to refer to actions, or what an individual does as opposed to what an individual believes. Mormons use two scriptural references: the first found in the *New Testament* Matthew 7:16 which reads, in part: “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” The second, more important reference (for Mormons), is from the *Book of Mormon*, Alma 41:3 which reads: “And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good.”

It is also an example of how religious beliefs are a lived experience. As this chapter unfolds I will show how an LDS doctrine of family affects ideas of duty of care, and how the historical background of Mormonism influences modern LDS volunteering (service and care) patterns; both of which add to the construction of an ethic of care.



Very similar to the notion that for many Mormons, having a successful marriage is living a religious life (chapter five) in this chapter I strive to show how compassion and acts of kindness are also religious acts. Like marriage, exhibiting and exercising an ethic of care is part and parcel of being a Mormon. The Mormon culture places a strong emphasis on caring for family and fellow congregants (Johnson, Cohen, and Okun, 2013:842) and LDS doctrine supports that emphasis. A verse out of the chapter of Alma in the *Book of Mormon* frames the concept of “works” as a religious act. Alma 41:3 reads:

And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good.

In LDS doctrine, “works” actually becomes a saving principle and practice by which “men<sup>253</sup>” (meaning all of humankind) will be judged by. While “works” can be broadly interpreted, I find that for Mormons, like for many other Christians, works is taken to be service, or doing good deeds—in short, caring for others. Like many other elements in Mormon doctrine, *works* is a simple reduction of a much bigger concept.

In her 2008 book *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, sociologist Meredith McGuire explored the complicated world of religious beliefs and practices and finds that world to be complex, diverse, and much more untidy than she anticipated (16). McGuire stated that she chose to focus on the concept of a lived religion because it considers all of the ways that individuals approach religion in their spiritual lives. She described religious ritual as a chain of embodied practices with each link having its own social connectedness and spiritual meaning (100). McGuire is drawing upon the work of sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2000) who proposed that religion is a chain of memory, a way of believing that is legitimized by acts of belief (76). Ritual is as an act of belief that concretizes religious concepts into embodied practices (McGuire, 2008:100). For Mormons, the religious concept of serving God through service to others becomes embodied in practices of care. The beliefs that help forge the chain of these embodied practices include layers of meaning relating to family, kin, friends, community and congregation. Of course Mormons are not the only religious group whose spiritual practices reflect the importance of family, or of serving God. What could be seen as unique, however, is the amount of time Mormons spend engaged in their spiritual practices, or “works.”

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<sup>253</sup> I find that the vast majority of LDS literature, doctrine, etc. still uses this type of gendered language.

## Care

I use the phrase “social instances of care” as the title of this chapter to reflect how care is practiced in society and is assumed to be present, in situations of family and community (which also include kin, friends, and congregation). I noticed that during the interviews, ideas about care and kindness were often used interchangeably. Often when I asked someone to tell me about a time when others have served (or cared for) them, comments like “by small acts of kindness” and “people offer me their friendship” were given in response.<sup>254</sup> Other comments conveyed the essence of kindness. For instance, one woman told me that she felt cared for when people would tell her how much they enjoyed hearing her play the piano in Relief Society every week.<sup>255</sup> Most said that they felt that they had been shown kindness and caring through another’s act of service toward them. One young newlywed university student told me that growing up in the LDS Church he learned that:

In a ward family you usually have people that are looking for ways to help—they notice you need help before you ask. Maybe there is a death in the family and people will just come by with food, you don’t have to ask them to do it. It helps. It is a small thing, but a common thing.<sup>256</sup>

Although the Church is noted for their global welfare program (discussed in detail within this chapter), the common everydayness of caring for others, is what lies at the heart of care for Mormons. There are many small acts of care that happen seemingly spontaneously and naturally. The practice of care becomes second nature, an everyday part of being a Mormon. As one woman told me “taking care of others is just what we do, it’s kind of our Mormon DNA.”<sup>257</sup> As I now turn to examine the ways that care is practiced in family units, the LDS Church, and society, I will begin by introducing some of the characteristics of service.

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<sup>254</sup> Numerous personal interviews conducted during June, 2012.

<sup>255</sup> Personal interview conducted June 29, 2012.

<sup>256</sup> Personal interview conducted March 24, 2013.

<sup>257</sup> Personal interview conducted August 28, 2012.

## Service

Sociologist Robert Wuthnow holds that religious participation and belief does not itself generate convictions about caring for others, but caring is channeled through church programs; thus, care and charitable activities are “shaped by the organization one attends” (Wuthnow, 1991:126-7). This is certainly the case within Mormonism.

Like most religions, Mormonism is not just a belief system, or worldview. Nor is it something that happens only within certain designated buildings; it is a lifestyle, an ethos a way of being in the world.<sup>258</sup> Ethnographic work, such as that performed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), allows researchers the opportunity to understand how symbols acquire meaning from contextually specific applications. In this case it is how the symbol of family (including care for family members) acquires meaning through the application of “works” and service to others. For Mormons meaning and a way of being in the world is driven by the LDS view that service to others is service to God. I have observed that service is the driving force behind callings, rituals of care, belief, and feelings about their congregation.

Reporting in the Washington Post, director of public affairs for the LDS Church Michael Otterson noted that “service is every bit as much a part of their (Mormons) religious identity as sitting in a pew” (2011). Serving others begins with a codified process of callings. It is common to be given a calling upon joining an LDS congregation. Since callings are congregation and ward specific, when individuals enter a new congregation (either by moving into it or by converting) they are given a calling. Most Bishops make it their goal to provide callings to as many adult members as possible. Mormons think about their callings as “opportunities for service” (Hammarberg, 2013:45).

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<sup>258</sup> It is possible to argue that for many Mormons who observe strict codes of conduct such as the Word of Wisdom, their ethos is also a lifestyle.

I found that service most often included acts and rituals of care. Some examples of acts of care I observed in my research are preparing meals for a new mother or the bereaved, watching fellow congregants' young children while the couple attends the temple, visiting someone in the hospital, or reading to someone who has had a stroke.<sup>259</sup> Rituals of care include priesthood holders giving a blessing to a sick congregant, helping dress a congregant for burial, or blessing a home.<sup>260</sup> The repeated performance of acts of care, and rituals of care, help shape the Mormons who execute them and establish a lifestyle of service. It is possible then, to say that Church callings, and the acts of care they prompt, is how caring is channeled through LDS Church programs.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz may argue however, that merely having programs that call for care do not necessitate caring individuals; the program merely creates a channel for the development of a disposition or a probability for care. In his work Geertz addressed the relationship between concrete symbols and a worshipper's set of dispositions. He stated that a disposition does not describe an activity, but the probability that the activity will be performed (1973:95). Geertz provided the example that "to be pious is not to be performing something we would call an act of piety, but to be liable to perform such acts" (ibid). Similarly, I argue that Church programs (callings) establish probabilities for care and that routine practice of care creates a set of dispositions, or an ethic of care. Still, even with an ethic of care there is a need for actual caring and social bonds in order for congregation to become a *ward family*. There may also be an element of social pressure—if being a good Mormon means caring for others, then there is most likely social pressure to care for others in order to show that you are indeed a good Mormon. While my research did not address this, I suspect it is present in some form.

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<sup>259</sup> These are acts that people told me about in the interviews or services that were requested in Church meetings.

<sup>260</sup> These are examples from the interviews.



The presence of social bonds (what holds society together) is an important factor in how people decide to exhibit care for one another. Durkheim's 1893 doctoral project, *The Division of Labor in Society*, sought to consider the ways social bonds functioned in society. In that work he stated that in societies where there is a mutual respect of the rights of one another, individuals "must first have a mutual liking, and have some reason that makes them cling to one another and to the single society of which they form a part" (1997 [1933]:77). In an LDS context, that reason is the ideology of family, and the set of practices that form lasting and institutionalized relationships of care such as the practice of care through callings. Mormons may not always have a mutual liking for each other, but they do have a mutual duty to care for one another.

Psychologist Ervin Staub's chapter in *Care and Community in Modern Society: Passing on the Tradition of Service to Future Generations* (1995) discussed how individuals that are willing to reach out and help others possess many characteristics including empathy, commitment to moral rules, seeing others in a positive light, and a general concern about human welfare. There is actually quite a bit of literature and research on the topic of ways in which religiosity influences volunteer rates. Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell's 2010 work *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* illustrated how religious Americans are more generous than non-religious Americans are with both their philanthropic giving and rates of volunteerism (444). Sociologist Robbin Gill agrees, but adds that in addition to having a greater tendency to volunteer churchgoers have a greater concern for the vulnerable and the needy, for the environment, and for international issues (1999).<sup>261</sup> I will return to continue this discussion in the section on community below.

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<sup>261</sup> Also see Becker, P.E. & P.H. Dhingra (2001) "Religion Involvement and Volunteering: Implications for Civil Society" in *Sociology of Religion*, 62 (315-335); and Wuthnow, Robert (2002) "Religious Involvement and Status-bridging Social Capital" in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41, (669-684).

An important element underlying a willingness to reach out and help others is feeling a “personal responsibility for the welfare of other people” (Staub, 1995:53). Feeling that one has a personal responsibility to care for others can stem from several sources, but especially within Christianity, responsibility often includes an element of reciprocity—forms of reward in exchange for believers’ actions and attitudes.<sup>262</sup>

Reciprocity can take on different tones in different religious traditions. For instance, Mormons believe that God gives people commandments to follow and rewards their obedience and compliance with blessings and salvation, and many Catholics believe there is a reciprocal obligation between worshipers and saints. Ethnographer Robert Orsi beautifully illustrates the bonds between saints and believers in his collection of essays *Between Heaven and Earth* (2005). As Orsi demonstrates, many religious people base their actions on a belief that God, saints, demons, and ancestors are all very real and will respond to their deeds in an appropriately reciprocal manner (2005:18). An example of this would be praying to Saint Jude to intercede in a difficult personal manner with the promise that if the matter is resolved the petitioner will honor the Saint on his feast day, or donate money to the church in the name of Saint Jude.

Expected reciprocity is at the root of devotional ritual performance such as pageants. Sociologist Meredith McGuire explored the reciprocity elements of processions, performances, and pageants such as the Christmas season *Los Pastores* held in the Mexican homes of San Antonio Texas. The Mexican pageant holders expect that by performing the pageant they can tap into divine power to help them meet their needs. The performers state that they do it for the

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<sup>262</sup> This is a rational choice argument. At the core of rational choice theory is the concept that as rational beings we pursue rewards and goals and seek the best ways to obtain those rewards. Rational choice theory is an economics model applied to human behavior; it is a needs met analysis that includes: return on investment, cost of goods, risk assessment, and intentional choice. Rodney Stark uses the term economy to emphasize the analogous subsystems of religion and commerce; both involve actual markets, products, demands and supply (as opposed to religion involving the same as metaphor only). Rationality explains that people make choices based on maximizing benefits and either reducing costs or acquiring benefits at the lowest cost after considering all potential costs. See Stark and Bainbridge, 1980, and Stark and Finke, 2000.

Christ-child “*para el Niño Dios*,” yet their devotional performance benefits the community (not Christ per se). The community benefits through neighbors working together to stage the pageant, and to celebrate together with the sharing meals and the exchange gifts. This devotional ritual performance “constitutes—not merely reflects—bonds of community” (McGuire, 2008:51). The entire event contains a process of gifting and reciprocal obligations between humans and a divine figure. For people engaged in these ritual pageants and performances, the element of reciprocity creates bonds between the performer, the audience, the religious community, and the sacred (ibid).

For Mormons the element of reciprocity is tied directly to God and their personal salvation. As mentioned, they believe that in the afterlife they will be judged by their works, which includes obedience to God’s laws and how much they helped others. In this sense, Mormons feel it is their sacred duty to serve others. Mormons are also among those who believe that God is more willing to grant blessings to those who serve others. In the May 2009 General Conference, Dallin H. Oaks presented a sermon on “Unselfish Service” to others. In his remarks he referenced the LDS view that service is connected to salvation and God’s blessings. Oaks reminded his listeners that when they follow Christ’s example and unselfishly served others, God promises eternal life and “the glory and joy of living in the presence of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ” in return (2009). As an example of unselfish service Oaks cited parenthood stating that “we rejoice that so many Latter-day Saint couples are among that unselfish group who are willing to surrender their personal priorities and serve the Lord by bearing and rearing the children our Heavenly Father send to their care” (ibid). While it is possible for many Mormons to find meaning in Oaks’ words, others, to whom God does not send children to, may feel that his remarks are a personal blow. I am certain that single Mormons feel that their service

to the Church and others is also unselfish, but when service is equated to parenthood, family can become a negative symbol.

In addition to reciprocity, another element of responsibility is duty, or obligation. As sociologist Janet Finch notes: “duty, responsibility and obligation are ‘things’ which may account for support between kin” (1989:7). One of the unstated assumptions in the claim that strong families equate to strong communities, a claim often made by the LDS Church, is that strong families care for each other (Finch, 1989). Naturally, what is deemed as “proper care” for kin varies between cultures, families, and even individuals. And, as I have discussed in chapter four, even ideas about who is family varies. Rather than discuss all the variables in care, I would like to focus on how ideas about obligation to care for family and kin is understood broadly within the LDS culture.<sup>263</sup>

### Family and Kin

*The middle-aged woman sat across from me in an overstuffed armchair. Her apartment was clean and cool; an oasis in the July heat. She is divorced with grown children, and like many in this area is struggling in economically challenging times. She worries that she will not be able to support herself, but she expresses emotions nearing despair that she cannot do more for her children--her thoughts and worries center on her family rather than herself.*

*I ask her to tell me how important the Church’s emphasis on family is to her. She replies: I would say, especially now, after going through the divorce and losing my husband, a lot of my material possessions, then losing my job, and well, really just everything, it comes down to all that I have left is family. I still have my kids, my grandkids, my parents, and my brother. So, over the last couple of weeks it has made me think more about that when there is nothing else left, that’s really all you have to count on. My family has been really supportive to me and that makes a big difference in my emotional well-being, and being able to get through this. Even though they can’t give me money, still knowing that they are there...knowing I don’t have to do it alone helps a lot.<sup>264</sup>*

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<sup>263</sup> That is not to say however, that care (for family, friends, community, and Church) as I discuss it in this chapter is exclusive to Mormons; nor is it to say that all Mormons will agree on my interpretation.

<sup>264</sup> Personal interview conducted July 31, 2012.

As this interview snippet illustrates, Mormons think about their biological family, as well as their ward family, as a source for help and care. They rely on family members to help them through difficult times, but also see that when they belong to a ward family, that congregational group will also exhibit “proper care” for its members just like a biological family would be *expected* to, (which is to say that although it is expected it is not a given; many biological families fail to provide proper care for their members).

Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (2013) discusses the mutuality of being, or existence, as a way of explaining how kinship groups work for the mutual benefit of all members. And, just as the woman describes above, Sahlins notes that “kinsmen are people who live each other’s lives and die each other’s death” (28), meaning that they share in each other’s sufferings and joys. This act of sharing, or mutuality of existence, contains a “sociology of moral, ritual, and practical conduct” (30).

In her 1989 work *Family Obligations and Social Change*, sociologist Janet Finch set out to define the relationship between family and public obligations, and in particular to refute claims that public assistance undermines family ties.<sup>265</sup> Her work is based on the assumption that “natural obligations” (Finch, 1989:7) exist within family units, and it is when those obligations are not met that the state must intervene. These “natural” obligations fall into five main categories: economic support, accommodation, personal care, practical support and child care, and emotional and moral support (14). Finch does a thorough job of discussing the mechanics of each of the five categories of obligation, but does not explore the source of the underpinning values that prompt a sense of duty in care towards family as carefully. In the introduction to her work Finch briefly stated that a Victorian sense of values based on Biblical passages is assumed

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<sup>265</sup> Finch’s work actually shows how government assistance may actually encourage rather than undermine support as added support frees up families to focus more on maintaining the relationships needed for continued support.

to be a natural foundation for ideas about duty to support relatives (3); but she does not question that assumption further, nor does she question the ways in which religious commitment influences ideas about family obligation and care although her findings could be used to help support claims that religious based ideas influence care for kin.<sup>266</sup>

What is significant about Finch's work, and why it is important to my study, is that she presents evidence suggesting that relationships of care are not necessarily confined exclusively to kin (241). She argued that although kin relationships are easily assumed to be automatic, irrevocable, and naturally contain a sense of obligation, the truth is obligation to kin is not a set of fixed rules, but a continually negotiated relationship based on reciprocity between giver and recipient (204-242). She showed that government assistance may actually support family ties by giving families more resources with which to negotiate. She pointed out that we cannot assume family support exists or that it is anything like a ready-made set of moral rules that people automatically adopt. Finch concluded that a sense of duty and obligation toward kin is fluid and is re-affirmed through reciprocal assistance (242). Although Finch does not question it, the sense of reciprocal assistance could be greatly influenced by religious affiliation or commitment, and could be a source for moral values which include obligations to kinship networks. Comments like the one below help support that idea.

*A single BYU student told me "We take the perspective that we are all brothers and sisters and part of a larger family just as people on the earth. It's almost like you feel like the ward becomes your family and the friends in it become your family and just with the goal of working together to help each other like a family would".<sup>267</sup>*

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<sup>266</sup> Finch is pointing to an historical view of family obligations in early 1900s Britain as the source for Victorian values. Social policy concerning familial duties of obligation set by the state helped establish those values which assume that relatives (especially spouses, parents and children) be affectionate towards each other and look after each other's needs. Such relationships and obligations were considered "natural" and as such need to be supported by the state, but not reinforced by the state.

<sup>267</sup> Personal interview conducted August 25, 2012.

Perhaps the most common religiously based idea of reciprocity is “the golden rule” which is represented in some form in every religion in America (Putnam and Campbell, 2010:463). “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is a ubiquitous religious and moral value. Putnam and Campbell suggest that “the golden rule” may explain the “good neighborliness of religious Americans” (2010:463). I will return to the idea of neighborliness below, but first I would like to explore how the golden rule affects Mormons ideas about care.

For many Mormons, learning and practicing the golden rule begins at home with the family. The golden rule is suggested as a topic for Family Home Evening (FHE). The official FHE manual lists Matthew 7:12 (whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so unto them) as supporting scripture for the lesson. A June, 2010 Church magazine article “The Law of Moses and the Golden Rule” describes how using the golden rule as a FHE topic helped a family become a happier and more peaceful family (Joslin, 2010).

In the interviews I heard people talk about how they learned such lessons at home. One young couple told me about the importance of family as a priority. He replied: “everything begins inside the family. Your highest priorities and not have a self-serving attitude begins by learning to serve your family. You learn everything at home first.”<sup>268</sup> Generally speaking, I found that for Mormons, caring for others and service to others is at the core of the LDS metaphor of family. This type of family metaphor is not exclusive to Mormons however.

In 2008 a team of researchers from Northwestern University looked at middle-aged adults who are both highly religious and politically active to discern whether conservative and liberal Christians vary in their use of implicit family metaphors within their personal life narratives (McAdams et al., 2008). Based on the work by Lakoff that showed that political liberals and conservatives have different understandings of political authority, the study sought to test how

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<sup>268</sup> Personal interview conducted April 2, 2013.

the competing narratives of family compared. Their findings showed that there was a difference between the way conservative and liberal Christians used personal narratives of authority, care, and empathy to describe their lives. They found that the personal narratives of conservatives contained more mentions of authority figures enforcing rules and instances of self-discipline and personal responsibility, whereas liberals told stories more centered on the self and learning empathy and care for others through engaging with others directly (McAdams, et al. 2008:987). Interestingly, Mormons, which were not included in their study, would not easily fall into one or the other camp. I found that Mormons exhibited elements of both types of personal narratives equally although they would be classified as conservative Christians (a point which I will return to shortly).

McAdams et al. admits that their findings are purely correlational and that it is difficult to know exactly how either liberals or conservatives experience scenes of learning empathy over the course of their lives (989). The researches asked themselves if personal narratives are constructed from actual experienced episodes from the past, or are they reframed through narrative in order to create meaning and rationalizations for current situations (989). Although we are left with questions, the study does give us insight into how understandings of family reflect political worldviews, regardless of how those views were constructed. The study adds important insights into how religious people construct meaning and provides a springboard to consider how Mormons may differ from other conservatives. It also offers insights into the ways that narratives are used to build a worldview of care.

As Perry and Cronin report, 60 percent of Mormons identify themselves as conservative, sixteen percent very conservative, and just one percent very liberal (2012:70). Given those statistics it might be expected that Mormons' narrative would fit quite neatly into the



conservatives category but I found through interviews and fieldwork that the Mormon narrative most reflected the liberal standpoint of using autobiographical scenes to develop empathy.<sup>269</sup>

This is most strikingly exhibited in the sermons given by LDS General Authorities which are heavily laden with autobiographical vignettes meant to teach others about moral beliefs.

Conversely, there is also a strong indicator that Mormons point to authority figures in their narrative in order to enforce rules as evident in “The Proclamation.” Based on my research, “The Proclamation” appears to be one of the main sources Mormons use to develop a sense of family obligation, and the source they point to as the justification for family obligation and duty. It is also the main text that Mormons extract familial themes from. These themes are then woven throughout narratives that support ideas of morality, caring for others, and family obligations.

In Mormonism, family and religious responsibilities are combined. “The Proclamation” states that “Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children” (CJCLDS, 1995). While some obligations and social bonds, like accepting a religious role are seen as voluntary and temporary, others, like family and kinship roles, are seen as being more permanent and carry near mandatory elements of duty. Unlike religion, in which some individuals are able to escape or evade religious duties, familial responsibilities cannot be so easily delegated to others (Goode, 1982 [1964]:5-6). This point of voluntary and temporary elements of duty is one area where Mormonism has a unique approach.

For Mormons the social bonds of family extend well beyond the immediate family to include extended families and kin. “The Proclamation” states that “extended families should lend support when needed” (CJCLDS, 1995). Often in the interviews individuals would reference extended families. One woman told me that to her family was “parents, cousins, grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts, uncles, second cousins, friends, and basically, people who just feel

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<sup>269</sup> I am addressing narrative here rather than practices of care, although care is often a theme of the narratives.

like family.”<sup>270</sup> Her definition of family was very large and expansive, yet not at all unusual. Having lived among several different cultures of people, I can say that many people view large groups of kin as “family” and see very little difference in the level of duty required in serving a brother versus an uncle or cousin. Familial responsibility extends to all that are considered family. For instance, in China, perhaps because most nuclear families are so small, familial responsibility extends to anyone who is blood related.<sup>271</sup> Mormons are no different even though their families can be very large. What is different about duty in care for family members is where that care ends.

As discussed previously, Mormons believe that the family is an eternal unit. In a nuclear family, this means that duties to care for spouse and children do not end at death, they extend into the afterlife. This responsibility of care extends in many directions; families care for their dead through temple ritual, and the dead care for the living by watching over them from heaven. I heard several stories of dead ancestors showing up to watch over their children, grandchildren, and other family members.<sup>272</sup> Mormons also assume that care continues between family members, especially spouses, in the afterlife. One man in his late thirties has been married to his wife for about five years. They have one small child and are expecting their second. In talking about the importance of family he tells me “knowing that I am married for eternity makes both of us willing to work through our problems; I guess you could say that this is an extreme long-term relationship!”<sup>273</sup> In talking with this man, and other Mormons, I got the impression that taking care of a spouse had an added element of eternal responsibility. Mormon families expect that

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<sup>270</sup> Personal conversation dated October 28, 2013.

<sup>271</sup> It is a common misnomer that all Chinese families are limited to one child when that is not the case. Certain ethnic groups are given unrestricted family size as well as many farmers. Also, if a child is the only child of parents who were also only children, the child will be allowed to have additional children without a tax penalty. In all cases, having more than one child is not illegal, it is just cost prohibitive due to tax penalties. The Chinese government does not force women to have abortions, but they do provide them at a very low cost if any cost at all.

<sup>272</sup> A more robust discussion of the paranormal in LDS culture is outside the realm of this work.

<sup>273</sup> Personal interview conducted August 28, 2012.

care for one another will extend into the eternities. For Mormons that care includes performing temple ritual for ancestors.

As discussed in chapter five, temple rituals include joining temporal families together forever, but also retroactively joining ancestral couples and families as well as performing other salvific rituals such as baptism. In this sense family responsibility includes the duty to look after the salvation of ancestors (as previously discussed). There are times when families (as opposed to individuals) look after families in this way. This both supports, and is supported by, Joseph Smith's idea of all of humankind belonging to a larger human family.

The act of looking after ancestors can be very meaningful for families performing temple ritual. It is not always easy to talk to Mormons about their temple experiences since they consider them so sacred, but one young married man in his early twenties was eager to share one particular experience with me. I had asked him if he had done any temple ritual for his own ancestors. He told me: "When I was 14 we went back to Nauvoo and my dad baptized me for his own father."<sup>274</sup> So, that was a very special experience for me then." I wanted to make sure I understood, so I asked if that meant he was standing in as his grandfather, while his father performed the baptism. He replies "Yes! In essence my father baptized his own father, and I got to be my grandfather."<sup>275</sup> This was an important experience for him and he said that he felt it was an act of service that brought him closer to both his father and his grandfather.

There are other LDS rituals that reflect the sense of care within multi-generational family groups. An older woman in her early seventies told me that she enjoys seeing all the babies blessed in LDS sacrament meetings. A baby blessing is a naming ceremony wherein the father (if he is a priesthood holder, another man if he is not) gives the infant a name and a father's blessing

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<sup>274</sup> Young adults (boys and girls aged 12 and over who have been members for at least one year) are allowed to do proxy baptisms, but no other temple ritual until they are 18 and/or have graduated from High School.

<sup>275</sup> Personal interview conducted April 2, 2013.

telling the child what God and the parents hope for the life of the child (usually things like health, behaving well and being a good sibling, going on a mission, and marrying in the temple). The blessing circle is made up entirely of men although afterwards in many wards the mother of the child is asked to stand so the congregation can acknowledge her as well as her child and husband. Besides giving the child a name, it is also the first chance the congregation has to formally welcome the new infant into their fold. The woman goes on to say that she sees the way families care for each other every time a baby is blessed. “I love it when I see a baby is blessed and the great grandfather, and the grandfather, and the father and maybe his brother are all in the circle blessing this beautiful child.”<sup>276</sup>

Although duty may be what initially prompts service and care, I found that it was more common for the Mormons I spoke with to refer to service as filling a need rather than a duty.

One middle-aged woman told me:

Whether we are standing in for someone’s great grandfather in the temple (baptism or sealing) or whether we are helping a stranger move, it is all service, and an act of love. You are just trying to help out. It is as simple as that. Both kinds of service are vital – people have both spiritual and temporal needs. Service is just filling a need.<sup>277</sup>

I found that in many ways Mormons did not differentiate between caring for family or friends. There seemed to be an underlying expectation that family members would care for each other, and such a thought is certainly codified through “The Proclamation” (CJCLDS, 1995). Yet, Mormons are often just as willing to give friends the same level of care as they are relatives.

## **Friends**

Most people consider friends as the people they choose to be with as opposed to family, which they do not choose. Schneider states that we are born with our relatives, we do not choose

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<sup>276</sup> Personal interview conducted June 29, 2012.

<sup>277</sup> Personal interview conducted April 4, 2013.

them. He even goes so far as to state that “there are no ex-fathers, ex-mothers, ex-brothers, or ex-sisters, ex-sons or ex-daughters” (Schneider, 1980 [1968]: 46). While overstated, as people do sometimes denounce and disavow family members, he makes the statement to illustrate the differences in behavior that an employee can be chosen, replaced, etc., and a daughter for instance cannot. In other words, the standards are different. He adds however, that people do choose which relatives to acknowledge; so while one can never stop being a daughter, one can stop being acknowledged as one. This also holds true for ward families; ward families also choose which members to acknowledge, and which to exclude. I will return to discuss this topic further in the next chapter.

For many Mormons, their wards contain people they never would have chosen as friends, or ward family members, but have come to love nonetheless, replicating that sense of givenness. For example, one middle-aged man told me that he just did not feel he fit in with his fellow congregants. “We are just so different that these are not people I would not willingly choose to spend time with. But, I have come to love them and would do anything to help them if they needed help.”<sup>278</sup> He noted that while he does not think of his fellow congregants as friends, they are people he loves as members of his *ward family*. This does not seem to be an isolated instance. An October 2001 General Conference sermon “Doctrine of Inclusion” given by Elder M. Russell Ballard, referred to this situation of not choosing to be friends, but establishing a friendship nonetheless. Ballard quoted an LDS member referring to his fellow congregant: “if our friendship had been put through a computer matching service, I doubt we would have made it through the first hurdle” (Ballard, 2001).

It is not by chance that Mormons are willing to reach out to friends, and even strangers and offer aid. In the 2001 General Conference sermon mentioned above Ballard included the

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<sup>278</sup> Personal correspondence dated April 15, 2013.

parable of the “Good Samaritan” and a story of how a local ward (congregation) helped a young non-member woman after her husband died by taking her meals and offering support. Ballard stated that “if we are truly disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will reach out with love and understanding to all of our neighbors at all times, particularly in times of need” (2001). He went on to state that “surely good neighbors should put forth every effort to understand each other and to be kind to one another regardless of religion, nationality, race, or culture” (ibid). He suggested that a way to be kind to others is to get to know them, spend time together with them, and make friendship an end in itself rather than a means to an end (such as conversion). In other words, be pro-social.

Staub’s research found that generally people held one of four worldviews reflecting what he called their “prosocial orientation” which influenced their willingness to assist someone in distress: caring, liberal, materialistic, and religious worldviews (1995:54). Staub defined these four orientations in very broad terms; *caring* indicated that a person was willing to help in emergency situations, *liberal* that a person was concerned with social change, *materialistic* that a person was unwilling to help others, and the *religious* worldview as being associated with charitable donations and helping in one’s own community.

In all cases Staub found that there was a clear connection between having a feeling of competence or power to help others and actual helping (1995:54-55). For instance people who had previous experience in providing aid to others stated that they felt they had the power to improve the welfare of those needing assistance, and those same people reported providing more aid. He noted a connection between participation and learning by doing and a willingness to offer care to others. Therefore, Staub concluded that caring for others, or the origin of care, was rooted in “experiences of interaction” (56). I found a similar trend in the Mormon groups I observed.

Even though handbooks are provided to Bishops (and basic guidelines to other callings), all of those who mentioned the handbooks stated that they were vague and much was left to the interpretation of the individual. Mormons took this in stride as a way of being “led by the spirit” of the calling rather than being led by a rule. All of those I spoke with said that they learned a lot from each of their callings and that with each calling there were challenges, but also previously learned skills to draw upon. What Staub’s research helps to illuminate then, is how the Mormon practice of caring for others is rooted in experience of interaction. His work provides insight into how, by being willing to help others, Mormons have a prosocial orientation that influences their participation in providing care for others.

In his chapter “The Catholic Ethic and the Protestant Ethic” in *Care and Community in Modern Society: Passing on the Tradition of Service to Future Generations*, professor of social work John Tropman is quite accurate when he pointed out that there is a need to examine the relationship between religious orientation and philanthropy (1995:269). His goal was to consider two different religious “cultures” or “ethics” with differing beliefs and dispositions in order to learn more about how religion is an important component in views about addressing other’s needs.

Tropman stated the Protestant ethic has an individualistic focus which has three concerns: 1) a predestined salvation 2) that all work is God’s work, and 3) worldly success (social status and other forms of wealth) are an indicator of sacred (saved) status. Having this religious culture led people to believe that a state of poverty was a personal failing rather than a social condition (274). In contrast, Tropman stated that the principal feature of what he calls a “Catholic ethic” is an orientation toward community and family with an emphasis on concern for others (271).

The Catholic tradition supports the ideology of gaining grace through good works. This, Tropman stated, leads the individual to emphasize “self-in-community” and an outward expression of sharing (272). This “self-in-community” is a way for the individual to serve a community, and may also help a community serve society. Tropman found then, that this religious orientation, the “Catholic ethic,” is positively correlated with philanthropy, especially in giving aid the poor. Similarly, I found that with the LDS focus on “works” Mormons too see a direct connection between their religious orientation and their care for others.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the LDS *Book of Mormon* frames the concept of “works” as a religious act (Alma 41:3). Although the Protestant ethic sees all work as God’s work, according to Tropman’s findings, in the Protestant tradition, work becomes competition rather than cooperation. For both Catholics and Mormons, “works” does have some individual focus (the individual is still doing God’s work, and is rewarded for it), but the orientation of their work is toward social relationships and includes community and kin.<sup>279</sup> I found that Mormons exhibit the same type of self-in-community orientation as the Catholic ethic and is similar to what I have named an ethic of care in Mormonism. For Mormons their ethic of care includes philanthropic efforts and caring for the poor and needy.

As I considered both Staub’s and Tropman’s findings, I questioned whether there was one more link between religion and philanthropic acts that neither addressed—could it be that having a codified system of providing aid to others (such as LDS callings) made those giving aid feel more competent to offer help to others? In other words, does feeling as if you are called by God to help others in specific ways empower as well as provoke service? I am inclined to answer yes—that having a codified system of providing aid to others produces a habit to provide aid. As

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<sup>279</sup> Although I am using Catholics and Mormons as examples here, I am neither assuming nor asserting that these are the only two religious groups that exhibit this type of connection between religious orientation and philanthropic acts.



one man in his mid-twenties told me “serving people just becomes a habit.”<sup>280</sup> Service becomes a form of religious practice and what it means, in part, to be a Mormon—an LDS *habitus*.<sup>281</sup> As McGuire has pointed out the embodiment of a spiritual or religious practice is a bricolage of beliefs, practices, relationships, experiences, and commitments, rather than a static institutional model (2008:185-6). An embodiment that becomes a habit is just as complex and layered—it is developed line upon line, precept upon precept. The system of LDS callings does contribute to the Mormon ethic of care, but we also need to consider other factors including relationships and community before we have a complete picture.

### Community

Ideas of civic virtue, and being a good citizen, most often include elements of moral obligation in caring for others. Many Christian and Jewish congregations believe that a central element of being a religious person is the act of loving fellow human beings (Ammerman, 2005:117). For example in Jewish congregations the practice of *tikkun olam* (the ethical bettering, literally perfecting, or repair of the world) and *mitzvot* (doing deeds of righteousness) are a central part of Jewish life. Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, in his book on *Jewish Literacy*, stated that “Judaism believes that the goal of Jewish existence is nothing less than to perfect the world under the rule of God”—*tikkun olam* (2001 [1991]:618).

While most Jews will state that the word *mitzvot* means “good deed,” Rabbi Telushkin adds nuance by stating that in reality, *mitzvot* means “commandment” (2001 [1991]:553). He pointed out that there is a subtle, but very significant difference. Doing a good deed implies that the deed is done voluntarily, responding to a commandment implies the deed is obligatory rather

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<sup>280</sup> Personal interview conducted April 2, 2013.

<sup>281</sup> Bourdieu (1977).

than optional. While both may be done willingly (voluntarily), in contemporary Western culture it is commonly assumed that only voluntary acts (void of obligation) are noble and selfless, and that acting out of obligation is an act of selfishness. Telushkin disagrees with that line of thinking. He points out that the Talmud states that “Greater is he who is commanded and carries out an act, than he who is not commanded, and carries it out” (*Kiddushin* 31a). With that in mind, Telushkin noted that voluntary acts are only done when it is convenient, while commandments are constant. Therefore, carrying out a commandment, even when it is very difficult to do so, is the greater, more selfless act (2001 [1991]:553-54).

Similar to Jewish thought, most Christian congregations understand that they have an obligation to serve the world as well as serving their own members (Ammerman, 2005:115). Many Christians point to the passage from Matthew 22:36-40 in the New Testament as the source of this obligation. In that passage, Jesus tells his followers, that the first great commandment is to love God, and the second is to “love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39). Therefore, many congregations center their worship and outreach ministries on loving God and loving neighbor. Yet, the work of Robert Wuthnow, in his *Act of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves* (1991) suggests that many congregations are not as clear about specific teachings on care.

Wuthnow agrees that most Americans believe in God and Christ’s teachings about love and compassion, but found that the people he interviewed were “at a loss for words when asked to describe any specific religious teachings that might be relevant to their efforts to be kind and compassionate” (1991:158). People knew of religious organizations that sponsored charitable activities, and some were even involved in those activities. People were familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan, and knew that compassion was part of what their religion taught, but

could not say how or why (158-9). “A woman in her seventies who had attended church faithfully all her life, for example, said it was very difficult for her to say exactly what her church taught about caring” (Wuthnow, 1991:159).

Conversely, sociologist Nancy Ammerman reported that Jehovah Witness, Latter-day Saints, and Christian Science congregations each have a unique approach to service. She commented that Jehovah Witnesses feel that missionary work should be the focus of their obligation while Christian Science congregations “expect to make a difference in the world through prayer” (Ammerman, 2005:116). She stated that the LDS focus includes providing material relief, but that the relief is directed “almost exclusively toward their own members (ibid.) Exclusivity is a perception that the Church deals with routinely. J. B. Haws, in the book *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* (2013), reported that LDS volunteers wear distinctive shirts when doing disaster relief work in order to draw attention to their presence as a way to refute the notion that Mormons only care for their own (222). Thus, Ammerman’s statement about the LDS relief focus is not completely accurate as I will illustrate in the sections on volunteer rates and the LDS Church Welfare below. What both scholars point to, however, is the significance of how clearly the LDS articulates the need and expectation of service.

For the early Mormons caring for others extended well beyond the immediate gathering of saints. As stated in chapter one, Joseph Smith felt that all of humanity belonged to one human family; he dreamed of creating a society of believers who would live together harmoniously committed to one another and God (Bowman, 2012:32). This commitment to caring for all of humanity also continues in today’s LDS Church. As political scientists Luke Perry and Christopher Cronin point out, attention to social policy and providing for the poor are part of the

modern LDS political and theological standpoint (2012:77-83). They stated that the contemporary LDS Church has identified providing welfare and humanitarian assistance to people of all faith as an expression of their desire to follow Christ's teachings.

Many scholars are interested in measuring rates of volunteering as a way of measuring rates of the "civic health of the nation" so named by the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency for service and volunteering (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2012). Wuthnow, for instance, argues that American congregations are concerned not only with the health of their own nation, but addressing global issues such as global hunger by working directly with international nongovernmental agencies (2009:235). A study first published in 1985 by a group of sociologists led by Robert Bellah aimed their work at understanding the meaning of public life in relation to cultural and social problems, and the state of society. That study, *Habits of the Heart*, stated that the litmus test for judging the health of a society is how traditions (biblical and republican) deal with problems of wealth and poverty (Bellah, et al. 2008 [1985]:285). They suggested that a divided world (divided along lines of race and economics) is not healthy and needs to be transformed. In order to be fully transformed, Americans would have to work together for the common good, and that means moving away from individualism into community (50-51). Yet, moving into community is not always easy.

While I was in New Jersey I rented a tiny cottage from an elderly woman who lived in a bigger house on the same property. The property was not overly large, but it was certainly more than the woman was physically able to take care of. When fall came I asked my landlady if she would mind if I invited the LDS missionaries over to help me clean up the yard for her. The missionaries were always asking me if there was anything they could do to help me and I thought this would be a great help to me and my landlady. When I approached her with my idea she was

more than skeptical and very apprehensive about having them over. As I talked with her about it I realized that she was actually more concerned with inviting strangers onto her property, and possibly her home, than she was about being a potential target for zealous proselytizing. She wanted to know, exactly, what they expected in return for their help with the yard, and if it was safe to have them over. When I told her that they expected nothing other than a chance to serve others, she was skeptical, but she finally agreed to let them come and help rake the leaves. The missionaries were, as I expected, happy to come over and rake leaves as a service to me and my landlady. The landlady was pleasantly surprised that they worked so hard and made the yard look so nice. Later she would tell me she just could not believe that such nice young men would want to help someone and want nothing in return. This experience illustrates that while Mormons, and other religious groups and individuals, are willing to go out and work together for a common good and move into community, the community is not always ready to receive them.

Robert Bellah (Bellah et al. 2008), Nancy Ammerman (2005) and political scientists Robert Putnam (2000) and David Campbell (Putnam and Campbell, 2010) are among those who have looked at the effect of social connections on American religious communities. Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton (2008 [1985]) in their work *Habits of the Heart* discussed how being able to recognize that the self is a part of a bigger whole contributes to ideas about citizenship and volunteerism (192-95). Wuthnow discussed how having connections beyond a local community gave congregations a sense of being involved beyond local needs (2009:237). Generally speaking he found that religious people are generally more compassionate than non-religious people and that religious involvement and conviction encourages altruistic behavior (Wuthnow, 1991:124-26).

Putnam's 2000 study also found that religious involvement was a strong predictor of philanthropic activity (2000:67). He stated that between 75-80% of church members give to charity compared to only 55-60% on nonmembers. Similarly, the rate of volunteer work is 50-60% for members and 30-35% for nonmembers (Putnam, 2000:67). The more recent work of Putnam and Campbell found that those numbers dropped to 45% of churchgoers reporting nonreligious volunteering compared to 26% for nonchurchgoers (2010:446). A 2013 study "Volunteering Among Latter-Day Saints" (hereafter referred to as "Volunteering") conducted by Van Evans, Daniel Curtis, and Ram Cnaan, examined Mormon habits of volunteering and giving.<sup>282</sup> This is the first study to measure LDS volunteerism. Their study stated that 97% of Mormons volunteer an average of 336 hours of volunteer labor annually in comparison to an average 48 hours of labor provided by the average American.

Obviously Mormons do say they volunteer more than non-religious or other religious people. However, if we look more closely at how they volunteer, we get a slightly different picture. The "Volunteering" study claimed that "an average active Latter-Day Saint volunteer provides about nine times more volunteer hours than an average American volunteer" (Evans, Curtis, Cnaan, 2013:838). Putnam and Campbell made a similar statement. They found that Mormons are more active in giving and volunteering even after taking their high level of religious observance into account (2010:452). While their figures showed a much higher rate of volunteerism than the national average, the findings of Evans, Curtis and Cnaan need to be closely analyzed in order to understand the similarities and differences in LDS and other forms of volunteerism. Using those findings along with Putnam and Campbell's work helps paint a clearer picture of Mormon volunteer rates as discussed below.

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<sup>282</sup> Evans and Curtis are LDS.

### **Mormon Volunteer Rates**

The 2013 “Volunteering” study by Evans, Curtis and Cnaan showed that on average, LDS volunteers provide about 37 hours a month while an average active volunteer in the United States gives about 4 hours a month (838). They clarified this by stating that not all groups volunteer at the same rate. For instance, their study found that the better educated, those who are employed, who own their own homes, and those who have children at home volunteer more than their counterparts. They also stated that those who attend church regularly tend to give and volunteer more than other Americans. Evans, Curtis, and Cnaan stated that roughly 62% of Mormons provide secular volunteer hours (2013:834). Those findings coincide with Putnam and Campbell’s which showed that 45% of churchgoers reported nonreligious volunteering (in addition to their church volunteer work) compared to only 26% of non-churchgoers (Putnam & Campbell, 2010:446).

The “Volunteering” study shows an impressive amount of time—roughly 9 hours a week (36 hours a month, 428 hours per year), that Mormons report doing volunteer work (Evans, Curtis, Cnaan, 2013:838). This is well above the one hour per week (4 hours per month) that they reported for average American volunteers. Evans, Curtis, and Cnaan’s one hour a week (4 hours a month) figure, is nearly half of the 2.5 hours per week that the Putnam and Campbell report for American volunteers (2010:444). Putnam and Campbell stated that the 2.5 figure is a conservative estimate based on a Census Bureau report they accessed in 2010.

In the chart below I compare the “Volunteering” study findings (2013) with Putnam and Campbell’s reports (2010:444-46) on religious and secular volunteerism. It is important to note that in LDS contexts a calling is a lay leadership position like Sunday school teacher, bishop, etc. while a ward assignment may be just a one-time task, not an on-going job. Being a bit more

specific and including examples of activities within each category of volunteerism provided a clearer picture of how Mormons think about how they volunteer. To an outsider's eye, the lines between the categories may seem fuzzy. A valid question would be why the "Volunteering" report has four categories while the Putnam and Campbell report only has two; surely average religious Americans also help fellow congregants move, or make a meal for them when they are sick, help out with youth camps, or have lay leadership positions in their parish, synagogue, mosque, etc. So, while the figures show an impressive amount of time Mormons volunteer, the way that the researcher's and their respondents have categorized the volunteer hours provides a glimpse of the way Mormons conflate Church, ward, and community.

<b>Category of volunteerism</b>	<b>Example of activity</b>	<b>Annual hours Mormons</b>	<b>Annual hours average non-religious American</b>	<b>Annual hours average non-religious American</b>
<b>Source of data</b>		<b>Evans, Curtis, and Cnaan (2013:834)</b>	<b>Putnam and Campbell (2010:446-447)</b>	<b>Evans, Curtis, and Cnaan (2013:838)</b>
Secular volunteering	Volunteering at a local non-profit, helping a neighbor in need, political volunteering	35	77	34
Community (religious volunteering)	Church organized blood drive; Church sponsored addiction recovery program; working with fellow congregants to clean up a local park.	38	126	0
LDS Volunteering for social purposes within the ward (often ward assignments)	Making a meal for a sick member of the ward, helping at a youth campout; helping someone move	97	N/A	N/A
LDS Religious volunteering (callings)	Ward callings.	166	N/A	N/A
<b>Total</b>		<b>336</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>34</b>

Table 7.1 Annual volunteer hours by activity excluding full-time missionaries.<sup>283</sup>

<sup>283</sup> Evans, Curtis, and Cnaan have excluded full time missionaries from their original findings which reduced the average amount of volunteering by 28 hours a month. They argue, however, that missionaries should be included in



Looking at the top line in the chart above, we see that Mormons, on average, contribute 35 hours annually while the average religious American contributes 77 hours; in other words, Mormons contribute less than half of what the average religious American contributes to non-church related activities. Even more interesting is that Mormons contribute about the same amount of annual hours to non-church related activities than the average non-religious American which contributes. As we continue to consider the successive lines of data we see that the annual hours that Mormons contribute continue to climb. Finally, on the last line we see that the average Mormon contributes abundant amounts of time to their Church related activities such as ward callings (e.g. Sunday school teacher, choir director, ward clerk, etc.). When both of the last two categories are combined we see that Mormons contribute a total of 263 hours (97 plus 166) hours, or 78% of their volunteer time to Church related activities.

Psychologists Kathryn A. Johnson, Adam B. Cohen, and Morris A. Okun compared the volunteer rates of Mormons, Catholics and Non-Catholics and also found that Mormons volunteered more frequently in Church related activities. They noted that “Mormons are especially likely to volunteer for the benefit of family and church” (2013:849). In his 2013 study “Religion and Volunteering Over the Adult Life Course” sociologist Joseph B. Johnston found that religious institutions offer more opportunities and motivation for formal volunteerism (749). Johnston found that religious beliefs play a greater role in volunteer motivation in black Protestant and evangelical Protestants than for Catholics and “mainline Protestants” (ibid). Johnston asked if volunteers had done work for a church, synagogue, or other religious organization over the last year and found that there was a positive correlation between the level of church attendance and religious volunteerism (743). Although Johnston did not use

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studies of Mormon volunteer rates as they “perform legitimate volunteer labor and represent the spirit of volunteering in the LDS Church” (2013:833).

Mormonism as one of his target groups, the study suggests how having a religious focus (lifestyle) would contribute to the higher levels of LDS volunteerism.

Considering how LDS volunteer hours compare with religious and non-religious volunteerism (as shown in Figure 7.2) we can see that LDS volunteering is not significantly higher or slightly lower than other American averages in specific categories. The “Volunteer” study pointed out that the total amount of time Mormons contribute (336 hours annually) is notably higher than the other two categories combined (2013). It is also noteworthy that even given that Mormons volunteer at about the same rate as other Americans (both religious and non-religious) on top of those average hours, they contribute a significant amount of time to their Church.

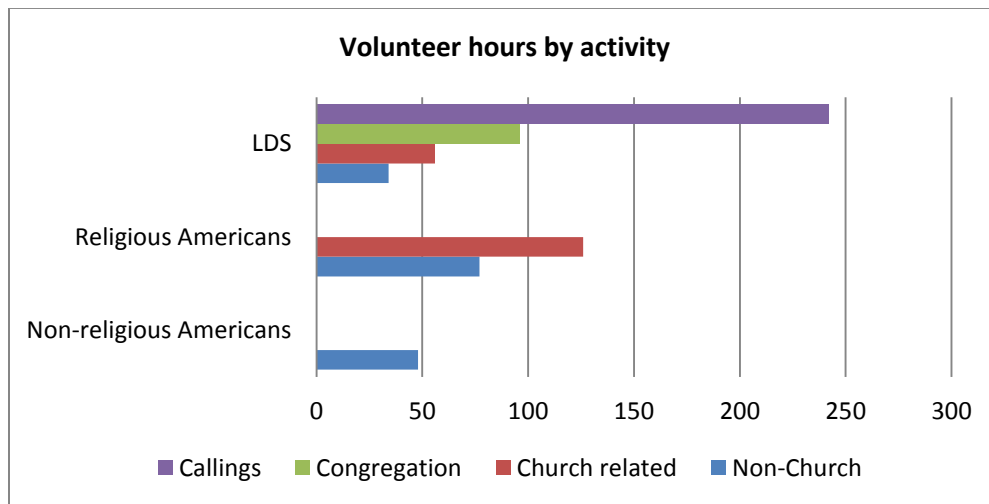


Figure 7.2 Volunteer hours by activity

If we were to eliminate the volunteer hours that are exclusive to LDS callings and assignments here is what our chart would look like:

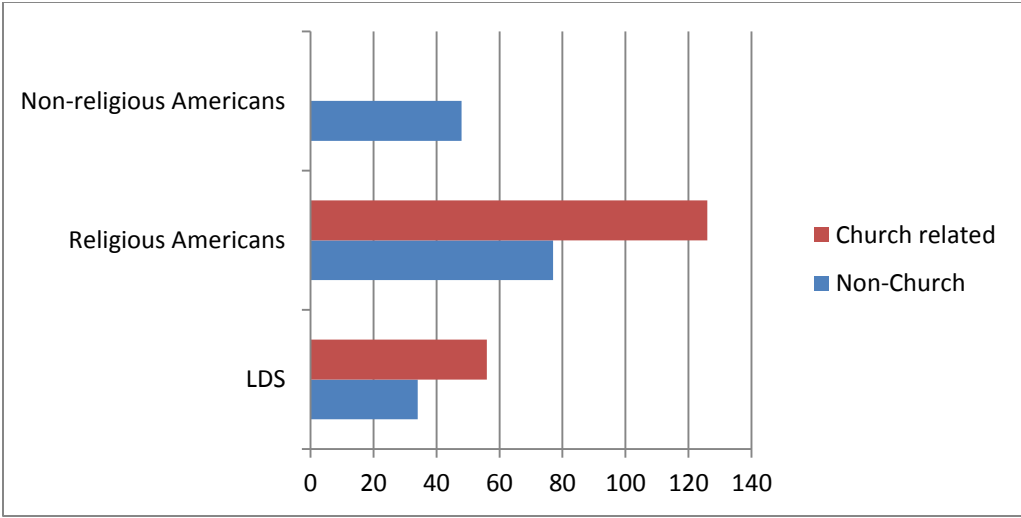


Figure 7.3 volunteer hours excluding LDS callings and assignments

If Ammerman’s (2005) statement that Mormons relief efforts are directed “almost exclusively toward their own members” (116) is accurate, we should expect to see the LDS volunteer hours in figure 7.3 nearly non-existent. As it is, we see that although the LDS volunteer rates lag significantly behind religious and non-religious Americans, they are still actively contributing towards the greater community, although only 12% of their time is volunteered in any non-church related activity.

One observation that Evans, Curtis, and Cnaan made that is important to consider is that within the religious volunteering hours, men volunteer significantly more hours than women. Although their sampling had slightly fewer males than females (47.6% males and 52.4% females), they found that men reported 304 annual hours of religious volunteering compared to only 193 hours reported by women.

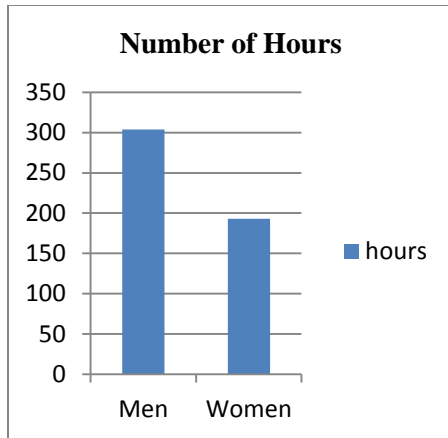


Table 7.4 number of hours by gender

Although the “Volunteer” Study noted that the difference between male and female volunteer rates was “significant,” the authors fail to provide a reason for such a difference. Rather than speculating why the authors noted a difference but then did not explain it, or appear to question it further, I contacted them to gain additional information. Researcher Dan Curtis explained that their analysis suggested that men are more often asked to serve in time consuming callings (e.g. in bishoprics). Curtis stated that after they had statistically controlled for the different callings, the difference in volunteering between men and women became statistically insignificant.<sup>284</sup>

I asked Curtis if it may be the case that families consider the time they volunteer collectively. That is, if the husband has a calling that is time intensive does the wife feel a lesser need to serve. Curtis stated he did not feel that was the case, but commented that in his experience, families look at service as a group effort within the ward. This means that if the ward (congregation and geographic area) has a lot of needs and is understaffed (lower functioning), more will be asked of each individual member. On the other hand, in congregations that are well

<sup>284</sup> Curtis is a PhD student at Penn School of Social Policy & Practice studying under Ram Cnaan. This additional information was not included in the original study report, but has been provided by Curtis through personal email exchanges between November 1, 2013 and December 15, 2013.

established and have many members able to fill callings, the amount of volunteering expected of any individual will decrease.

One could speculate that since the Church puts a great emphasis on motherhood, women could be spending more time at home caring for children. However, given that the average age of the “Volunteer” respondents was 50, it is highly unlikely that the women are spending more time caring for small children in the home. Despite this fact I found that most Mormons still point to hours spent in the home with children as a reason LDS women do not contribute as much to their congregation.<sup>285</sup> My observations, however, also point to something a bit different. I observed that women with young children are more often called to positions like Primary and Young Adults (programs for young children and teens) and that as women age they are left with fewer and fewer opportunities to volunteer. Ultimately, the difference in volunteer hours is not adequately explained and is worth investigating further under another study.

The “Volunteer” study did not measure the volunteer rate among children,<sup>286</sup> yet I asked Curtis to comment on his observations as a Mormon on children volunteering in religious settings. Curtis stated that the Church does a lot to acculturate children into giving service to others. Children are encouraged to participate in ward or stake service projects and, although children do not have callings, they are given small tasks to perform (such as scripture reading, giving a talk, etc.) during Sunday worship services like Primary and Sunday school. Older

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<sup>285</sup> In personal communications dated December 2, 2013, I asked two women who are involved in the Ordain Women movement to comment on the “Volunteer” findings concerning levels of volunteerism and the difference between the amount of time women and men commit to Church work. I wanted to know if they felt that women were not being given as many opportunities to serve and if the difference in hours reflected the exclusion of women from the priesthood (and callings requiring priesthood holder to fill). Their response was brief noting only that since motherhood is the most important calling for women, they spend more time at home. And, that the time spent at home serving in the “calling” of motherhood is not considered volunteer hours. They did acknowledge however, that they are concerned that women are not being given as many opportunities to serve in Church positions, and thus volunteer, as men.

<sup>286</sup> Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton conducted an excellent study on the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers in their 2005 study *Soul Searching*. Readers interested in volunteer rates of children are directed to that study.

children participate through the young women and young men's auxiliary organizations. These organizations all have service components which the young men and women are expected to complete. While I did not attend children's meetings, I did observe how children were encouraged to participate in Sacrament meetings (giving a talk, singing in a children's choir etc.), and in ward activities. Whenever the congregation had a ward project, families would work together and even very young children were given appropriate tasks.<sup>287</sup> Additionally, in all of the ward parties in both the New Jersey and the Salt Lake congregations, the young men and women (ages 12-18) always helped serve food or clean up.

The "Volunteer" study researchers did include the demographics of the 2,664 respondents which does give us some insight into the Mormons they surveyed. They surveyed church going Mormons from four different geographical areas: Southeastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey (19.6%), Michigan (13.7%), California (35.6%) and Utah (31.1%). Overall their sample included about 47.6% adult males and 52.4% adult females. Other demographics are as one would expect: 76% are married, 13.8% are single, 5.3% divorced, 4.2% widowed, and 0.6% separated. 83.9% had a median number of three children. Only 25% had a household income of over \$100,000, around 21% had an income at or below \$20,000 and the majority had an income of between \$20,000 and \$100,000. The study found that 86.3% of those surveyed were currently serving in a ward calling. They found that less than one percent of Mormons refuse a calling in any given year, and that converts are given callings as soon as possible (2013).

Political scientists Luke Perry and Christopher Cronin's 2012 study *Mormons in American Politics: From Persecution to Power* is slightly different than the demographic the

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<sup>287</sup> Ward projects are service projects that usually are large in scope and time and require many people to complete. Some of the projects I heard about included planting a large vegetable garden, pouring a cement driveway, building a handicap accessible ramp into a home, repairing a roof, doing landscaping around a home, and even remodeling a home.

“Volunteer” study used. Considering all Mormons in the United States, Perry and Cronin found that 85% of Mormons are married to other Mormons. They stated that the largest percentage of individual Mormons (28%) earn less than \$30,000 per year, and that 73% of Mormons felt that working to help the poor was an essential part of being good Mormon (2012:44-46).

Interestingly, Perry and Cronin noted that only 49% of Mormons felt that not drinking coffee or tea (which Mormons are required to abstain from in order to gain entrance into their temples) was essential to being a good Mormon (ibid).

Having presented data on how Mormons volunteer their time, the next step is understanding why volunteering is important to LDS congregations and what that means to the communities those congregations inhabit.

### **LDS Church Welfare Programs**

The establishment of the LDS Relief Society in 1842 can be traced through Smith’s thinking on the topic of welfare and care taking of the poor. Smith grew up in poor conditions – his father’s failed investment schemes had left his large family heavily in debt; LDS biographer Bushman notes that Smith grew up poor and knew deprivation firsthand (Brodie, 1995 [1971]:6-18; Bushman, 2005:155). With such a personal experience of poverty, it is no surprise that Smith claimed receiving revelation on the need to “look to the poor and the needy, and administer to their relief, that they should not suffer” (Bushman, 2005:155). In fact, in Smith’s view, the rich not giving to the poor was morally reprehensible and created inequality which poisoned society (ibid). Therefore taking care of the poor and needy was not only the ethical thing to do; divine revelation regarding the matter also made it a spiritual mandate. Smith wanted a society that would focus on the needs of the poor, the destitute, widows, and orphans (Perry and Cronin, 2012:81). This spiritual mandate and divine obligation to care for one another would be reflected

in the organization of the Relief Society, and in establishing that organization's duties and obligations. The establishment of the Relief Society, whose motto is *charity never faileth* was most likely the foundation for the Church's focus on welfare (ibid).

The LDS Church is becoming well known for its welfare programs, but it is not the only religious group with such a structure.<sup>288</sup> Take for example *tzedakah* (charity) in Jewish communities. Eliezer David Jaffe, in his chapter in *Care and Community in Modern Society: Passing on the Tradition of Service to Future Generations*, considered the importance of *tzedakah*, the free loan system,<sup>289</sup> as a possible model for addressing needs in depressed neighborhoods in both Western and developing countries (1995:251). The free loan system is focused on "helping people help themselves rather than by providing charity" (252). The LDS model of charity (or Church welfare program) is similarly focused.

The LDS Church's welfare programs offer temporary assistance, as their website states, "in the form of food, clothing and in the search for employment. Recipients are given the opportunity to work, if possible, in exchange for this assistance."<sup>290</sup> The Church states that assistance is offered to everyone and aid is not based on religious affiliation, ethnicity or nationality. Their goal is to offer hope and an opportunity for individuals to transcend disease, poverty and despair. The Church declares that bearing each other's burdens is part of God's plan—that by helping others they can be God's hands on earth.

The Church is also known for responding to global disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, etc. Since the Church is a local, national, and international organization, it is able to

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<sup>288</sup> Other structures formed by other religious groups include (but are not limited to): Catholic Relief Services, Christian Relief Services, Lutheran World Federation, and the Mennonite Central Committee.

<sup>289</sup> Israel Free Loan Association (IFLA) was founded by a small group of volunteers in 1990 and exists in Israel and the U.S. It primarily serves immigrants needing money for housing, medical costs and schooling. In late 1993 it had nearly \$3.5 million in circulation as revolving loans (Jaffe, 1995:250).

<sup>290</sup> From [www.mormon.org](http://www.mormon.org) "Our Humanitarian Program"



coordinate relief efforts quickly. According to the Church's website Mormon.org, the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has donated more than \$1 billion in cash and material assistance to 167 different countries in need of humanitarian aid since it started keeping track in 1985." Much of this type of charity is overseen by LDS Philanthropies, a department of the Church and its affiliated charities focused on feeding the hungry, healing the sick and clothing the naked. Perry and Cronin's work reported statistics of the LDS Welfare Services from 2011 and showed that 872,721 days of labor were donated to church welfare facilities which provide the materials for welfare relief around the world. That relief went to 179 different countries and territories and totaled \$1.4 billion in humanitarian assistance rendered between 1985 - 2011 (Perry and Cronin, 2012:82).

Despite such large welfare and relief efforts, and Joseph Smith's injunction that we are "to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to provide for the widow, to dry up the tear of the orphan, to comfort the afflicted, whether in this church, or in any other, or in no church at all...<sup>291</sup>" the LDS Church is often accused of being nearly exclusively inwardly focused with little aid offered outside of the LDS community. In the case of Ammerman's misunderstanding of LDS philanthropic efforts, she was referencing a 1990 work "The Philanthropy Dilemma: The Mormon Church Experience" by Mormon historian Dean L. May in which he speculated that due to the deep and persistent LDS identity, it was "more likely that the great bulk of church philanthropic endeavor will continue to be carried out primarily within the Mormon system" (228). However, May also cautioned readers against predicting future trends in Mormon philanthropy (May 1990:227). While indeed, 78% is indeed a great bulk, it is not "almost exclusively toward their own members" (Ammerman, 2005:116) as Ammerman stated.

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<sup>291</sup> This quote on the [www.mormon.org](http://www.mormon.org) website was taken from an early LDS Church newspaper *Times and Seasons* dated March 15, 1842.

While May's statement may have been true in 1990, when it was more likely that the bulk of church philanthropic endeavors take place within the system, there were some fairly major changes between 1990 (time of May's writing) and 2005 (time of Ammerman's work) that Ammerman may not have been aware of, even though 2005 was a big year for Mormon volunteer visibility. It was late August, 2005 when hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. Yet, even before the storm made landfall, Mormon trucks were on their way ready to respond to the natural disaster. One resident was noted as stating that while the U.S. troops were flying overhead, the Mormons in their bright yellow T-shirts were the only ones on the ground helping residents with the clean-up (Haws, 2013:222).

Perhaps part of the reason Ammerman (and possibly others) have misinterpreted the Church's philanthropic efforts is a lack of insight into Mormon thought. Allow a short digression here so that I may fill in some of those gaps, and offer a corrective stance on LDS humanitarian efforts.

As May pointed out in his 1990 work, the deep and persistent LDS identity that helps make Mormons a peculiar people is that their Church is a millennial church and that Mormons were to be citizens of Zion (as previously discussed). Early Mormons believed in the elimination of poverty for the citizens of Enoch's Zion. "Mormon church leaders cling with remarkable tenacity to their deep-seated belief that 'poverty, wretchedness, and oppression' will give way only to the personal regeneration that results from conversion and subsequent entry into the community of Saints" (May, 1990:228). In other words, Mormons put so much effort into missionary work because they believe that poverty will be eliminated when everyone becomes part of the Mormon community. "The religion saves the body only as it saves the soul" (ibid). Therefore, LDS missionary work is part of their philanthropic efforts. This is why the Missionary

Fund, Temple Patron and Construction Funds, as well as Family Search (related to genealogy and temple work) are all listed under affiliated charities within the LDS Philanthropies Department.

One could say that for Mormons, focusing their attention inward is how they see they can best take care of the world. As May noted, the community is responsible for the elimination of global poverty. Latter-day Saints “were enjoined to express their deepest love for humankind by converting all to the gospel. The converts would then enter a community where social, spiritual, and material needs could be effectively nourished” (May, 1990:213-14).

As illustrated in the discussion on volunteerism above, despite such focused inward attention, Mormons still manage to contribute to other community needs. One of the ways the Church looks to the needs of the community is by sharing their resources with members and non-members alike. Feeding the poor and hungry through local Bishops’ Storehouses is a program that has previously received little attention by those outside of the Church.

On August 23, 2012 an NBC television program *Rock Center with Brian Williams* featured “Mormon in America” which looked at the Church’s welfare operations. The show visited the 500,000 square foot warehouse in Salt Lake City Utah which serves as the Utah Bishops’ Central Storehouse--one of 143 storehouses located across the U.S. and Canada. Inside this facility the Church stocks supplies that will go to help victims of natural disasters as well as help feed those locally who cannot afford to feed themselves. A nearby facility called Welfare Square helps provide the goods that are stocked there. Seventy percent of the food stocked in the bishop’s storehouses is produced by Mormons, and the rest is purchased at large wholesale discounts (Perry and Cronin, 2012:80). The food is even distributed using Church equipment by Deseret Transportation which uses 42 tractors to haul goods in 98 trailers over 3 million miles

per year (ibid.). Food producing facilities in Welfare Square are completely church-run, volunteer factory operations which include a grain elevator, cannery, and bakery that all produce “Deseret” brand items. Each of the factories is managed by a salaried employee but run by volunteers (Hammarberg, 2013:288-290). An article “The Church and Its Financial Independence” run in the *Mormon Newsroom* (CJCLDS, 2012b) stated that while using volunteers for their production lines is more labor-intensive than if the lines were fully automated, it “provides opportunities for people to give service and for welfare recipients to work for what they get” (CJCLDS, 2012b). It also provides the Church with a tool to help give people on-the-job training and work experience.

In order to staff the production facilities, local stakes are told how many members are needed to fill shifts and volunteer signup sheets are passed around in Sunday meetings. Usually each ward only has to commit to filling around three shifts a month (in the Salt Lake ward each four hour shift usually called for five people). When the signup sheet for volunteers to work at the bakery went around in Relief Society one week, I eagerly signed up. I thought the best way to learn how the volunteer system worked was to become a volunteer myself.

The four other women and I decided to carpool to the downtown Salt Lake City facility. We were to work the 9:00am to noon shift. I am an early riser, so arriving at 8:15 for the carpool was not a problem. The only glitch I ran into was trying to decide if it would offend the other women if I brought along my travel mug of coffee.<sup>292</sup> In the end I left the coffee at home. Amusingly, weeks later when I was talking to another woman who worked with me that day, she had the same conversation with herself and also left her coffee at home that morning. On the other hand, some women did bring cans of cold diet coke since it was a hot July morning.

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<sup>292</sup> Drinking coffee is forbidden for devout Mormons and I have found that the majority of Mormons, whether they themselves are devout or not, err on the side of caution and shun coffee and tobacco in the presence of other Mormons. I decided to follow suit as did the other volunteer I mentioned.

The bakery was part of a very nice complex of low buildings that looked more like office buildings than factories. The square was surrounded by a tall, yet ornate metal fence and a large ornamental iron gate was across the entrance. Before we even walked through the door we could smell the freshly baked bread –it had a delicious, friendly, homey smell that made us all hungry.

We arrived in plenty of time and only had a short wait before the other volunteers from other wards arrived. There were about eleven volunteers in all and about six paid workers there already. The paid workers had been baking the bread so it was ready for us to process. At precisely 9:00am we were gathered together in the break-room. Throughout the day we were addressed as brothers and sisters and thanked for our “sacrifice and service of serving at the bakery;”<sup>293</sup> our shift began with a prayer offered by the foreman.

The break-room was the first room you walked into when you entered the bakery. The walls were adorned with newspaper articles about the bakery, religious themed artwork like you would find in any LDS meeting house and a framed photo of the LDS prophet and his two counselors. After the prayer we watched a training/safety video and were given a short explanation about what the bakery does and what our tasks would be. We were given aprons, gloves, and hairnets and then went into the production area.

There were huge ovens in the back of the production floor, and large racks of cooling freshly baked bread filled the lower half of the large room. The production line consisted of three slicing and bagging machines/stations, a conveyor belt that took the packaged bread through a metal detector (to check for foreign objects in the bread) and a packing area where the bread was put into pallets for shipping. The slicing and bagging stations took three people to run and they asked me to serve as a "loader." My job was to load bread into the slicing machine. Another

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<sup>293</sup> From field notes dated July 20, 2012.

person did the slicing and bagging, and the third person sealed the bag with a machine that applied a twisty tie.

The machines held up to five loaves at a time, and had to be loaded from the top. Given the height of both the cooling racks and the slicing machine I immediately realized the advantage my height gave me. I liked the fact that my position required some moving around; it was not demanding work, but did require some bending and lifting. Even though the various machines and conveyor belt made a bit of noise, I was still able to chat with the “twisty-tie man” at my station. He had worked here before and said he liked doing this type of service work. He told me that “as Christians we need to help others - everyone - not just Mormons. So, food goes to anyone who comes in and talks to the Bishop and shows a need, but the food is also used in humanitarian efforts like relief to natural disaster victims worldwide.”<sup>294</sup> This bakery provides bread to Utah, Idaho, Colorado, Arizona, and Nevada Bishop’s storehouses. The bakery runs 5 days a week and all they make is bread (white and wheat). Today they made 5,420 loaves of bread. The other volunteers ranged in age from late 30s to mid to late 60s; mostly women, but a few men as well. The majority was white but volunteers also included one Hispanic man, and one Middle-eastern woman. One of the men on the line told me that since it was noisy and hard to converse on the production floor he used the time to try to see how many scriptures he could remember. He was kind and willing to talk to me and hinted that maybe I should think about joining the church. Most of the volunteers seemed very happy to be working that day. Some said they were there working because they had used the Bishop’s storehouse and were doing this service as their “payment.” One woman overheard that conversation and remarked "Oh! I need to be sure to sign in and out--I don't want to work for nothing!"<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Personal conversation dated July 20, 2012.

<sup>295</sup> Personal conversation dated July 20, 2012.

During our shift there were groups of people that would come through on a tour of Welfare Square. The tour groups were led by missionaries. There was a big observation window on the shipping side of the work floor and both the workers and the observers smiled as they waved at each other through the glass. We got a 5 min break about half-way through the 3 hour shift. They had a hot fresh loaf of bread out for us with butter, jam and peanut butter-- it was delicious! When we finished we got to take home a loaf of bread from the "damaged" box - loafs that just didn't turn out right for whatever reason. It had felt good to work, to do physical labor, and to know that my work was helping others; and being able to take home a loaf of this delicious smelling bread felt like a special gift.

Welfare Square had its beginnings in the Great Depression. Goods produced there are not for sale, but are donated to the Utah Bishops' Central Storehouse which also supplies smaller local storehouses. A local Bishops' storehouse looks very much like a small market (grocery store). Isles are stocked with a variety of fresh, frozen and canned food. Most of the food is simple, no quick heat-and -eat type pre-prepared meals, but basics that can sustain good health.<sup>296</sup> Anyone (including non-members) can get food from this outlet in exchange for Church related service. Service can be anything from donating time at one of the Welfare Square facilities (like the bakery) to cleaning the ward meeting house. All that is required is that the individual meet with the bishop to discuss their situation and needs, then after the bishop has approved a food order the individual meets with the Relief Society president and fills out a food order (much like a shopping list). The food order can then be taken to a local Bishop's Storehouse where the individual can pick up the food.

The Utah ward I observed was an inner-city ward (geographic area) that seemed to be a melting pot for people in need. In that ward approximately 25 families a month were getting

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<sup>296</sup> The only item many consider a necessary staple that the Bishop storehouse does not supply is pet food.

assistance with food orders and using the Bishop's Storehouse (most wards assist less than ten families a month). In the interviews I asked one woman if it was common to give outsiders (non-members) help from the Bishop's storehouse. She told me that generally speaking those who receive help are Mormons, but that they have often helped people that were refugees. She said "if there is a need, the church will help them!"<sup>297</sup>

The Utah congregation as a whole was very focused on meeting the welfare needs of those living within the ward boundaries. In addition to the congregants doing what they could to assist, the Church had provided three sets of welfare missionaries to help meet the high level of need. Welfare missionaries are older couples that serve full-time missions with a focus on compassion and humanitarian relief efforts rather than proselyting. They work closely with local bishops and perform tasks such as helping fill and deliver food orders, provide transportation to church, doctor appointments, the Bishop's Storehouse, etc. I had hoped to be able to interview the welfare missionaries, but my numerous requests for an interview were consistently, yet politely declined.

I asked one congregant what he felt was the most important thing the congregants do to help the welfare recipients in the ward (meaning geographic area since not all welfare recipients are LDS) and he told me he thought that "the key is treating the other person with dignity and respect."<sup>298</sup> Part of feeling respected was feeling accepted. Most of those I interviewed said that they felt totally accepted without judgment by the Utah congregation and that this simple act of kindness and compassion made them feel that they belonged. There seemed to be an overwhelming sense of everyone struggling together in the Utah ward. One woman summed it up by stating "we're just a motley crew here, everyone here is poor and struggling, so we all

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<sup>297</sup> Personal interview conducted June 23, 2012.

<sup>298</sup> Personal interview conducted July 26, 2012.



know what it is like to be poor and we just help each other.”<sup>299</sup> I observed that helping each other was one of the things that the Utah ward excelled in.

### **Congregation**

As discussed several times throughout this work, for Mormons being committed to one another and to God is practiced through the execution of Church callings. As illustrated above, Mormons contribute an incredible amount of time to their Church in fulfilling these callings. Invariably when interviewees were asked how they participated in the congregation they would tell me about their callings. They would tell me what ward position they held, what their duties were, and the mechanics of their callings.<sup>300</sup> Similarly, when I asked them to tell me about a time when they had served others they often mentioned that they served others by doing their callings. Common responses also include serving a mission; indicating how this reflects the LDS identity mentioned above that Mormons consider missionary work to be philanthropic work.

In contrast, when I asked interviewees to tell me about a time when others had served them many told me about the social aspects of callings rather than the mechanics of their callings. More often, however, people told me about how they had felt cared for by those who served them, whether the service was part of a calling or not. For instance a woman told me that her visiting teacher had brought her flowers when her dad died. The thing that struck the woman being served by her visiting teacher was that she did not have to ask for the service, it was freely offered, and it was beyond a minimum effort. There are no rules that guide visiting teacher’s actions in caring for those they visit. As mentioned earlier the minimum that is required is that

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<sup>299</sup> Personal interview conducted April 2, 2013.

<sup>300</sup> For instance one woman told me about the logistics of preparing for the luncheons held after funerals. Funeral services are often held in the local ward meeting house; after the body has been taken to the cemetery the family and close friends (usually between 50 and 100 people) return to the meeting house for a lunch that has been prepared by the women in the ward. Often the family of the deceased is asked to donate money for the meat (usually a ham) but other than that there are no other costs to the family for the funeral service and luncheon, everything else (food, music, space for the luncheon, tables, etc.) is donated by the local congregants.

the visiting teacher makes some kind of contact with those she is assigned to. This means that the visiting teacher was under no obligation to even make a personal visit, let alone bring flowers.

Another aspect of fulfilling callings that interviewees mentioned is how providing service to others in this fashion helped them feel that they were positively contributing to the community. Feeling important and needed are elements that interviewees stated as helping them feel connected to their congregation. One couple agreed on this point. The woman told me “I feel needed and important here. If you have a calling it makes you interact with people more, you become a family, and you feel like you’re important and needed somewhere.”<sup>301</sup> This is a prime example of how an LDS *habitus* of care, or an ethic of care (which I will discuss more fully below) is embodied in the lived experience of community.

Although Church callings include a lot of bureaucratic and administrative tasks, there is a large part of the work that can be considered service not only to the congregation, but to the larger community. A middle-aged man who had held several high positions within the Church told me:

We do stuff to help out in the community. Not because it is a church assignment, we just want to give back—it is our responsibility as part of a community to help each other. Christ taught love your neighbor-- that means your Catholic neighbor, your Jewish neighbor, your Muslim neighbor, everyone, so that’s what we do.<sup>302</sup>

A woman told me that the Church taught her to show a Christ-like love to everyone and to serve others. And one other woman told me:

I think it is important to be part of your community too, not just your church community. I try to be kind to everyone. What I do for people within my church and congregation I would do for anybody. It’s just service. I would do that anyway, but in the LDS church there are greater opportunities to help others.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Personal interview conducted June 24, 2012.

<sup>302</sup> Personal interview conducted August 25, 2012.

<sup>303</sup> Personal interview conducted March 9, 2011.

Naturally, it would be a mistake to assume that Mormons only serve others and never receive service themselves. One man told me about his experience moving to Utah after having lost his house in a natural disaster. “Here in Utah the Church just embraced us. No strings attached, just were always there to help. People in this ward are just the most compassionate, most personable, spiritual, kindhearted people you’ll ever meet.”<sup>304</sup> However, he was not a member of the Church at the time he moved to Utah. In one group setting I heard him tell the story of how he was so impressed with the care and kindness that the Mormons had shown him that he wanted to find out more about them which eventually led to his conversion.

Several of those whom I interviewed commented that it was very difficult to ask for and receive help, but when help was truly needed it was offered and freely given, and was a humbling experience. One man (now in his mid-thirties) told me that before he left on his mission his dad told him that there would be people that would offer him things. His dad told him “they are not giving it to you, or doing it for you--they are giving it to the missionary. It is their way of serving the Lord – you need to let them.”<sup>305</sup> The man told me his dad was right; “someone noticed my shoes were almost completely worn out, they gave me a gift card for about \$100 to buy new shoes. I didn’t want to take it at first, but then remembered what my dad had told me. Now I notice missionary’s shoes more. Accepting and giving helps you become more Christ-like.”<sup>306</sup>

Another touching story was from a woman remembering her days as a university student abroad.

I was away from home going to school and had no money for food. Once there was nothing in the fridge, it was zero! Nothing at all! My roommate and I had nothing to eat and no money for food. One day I came back from school and looked in the fridge and it

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<sup>304</sup> Personal interview conducted July 26, 2012.

<sup>305</sup> Personal interview conducted August 28, 2012.

<sup>306</sup> Personal interview conducted August 28, 2012.

was filled with food! I thought it must be my roommates and did not touch it. Then, my roommate came home and said that the sisters from my church had come by and brought food for us. So, somehow, someone told the relief society president that we didn't have food, so they found a way to come and help. We never asked for help, they just helped. That's the way service works when you are in church, we help each other.<sup>307</sup>

Helping each other really does seem to be what Mormons focus on. Even non-Mormon college students report how, even though they may only know one Mormon friend, when help is needed, many more show up. Several people I interviewed remarked that “service is just what we do! We are taught from when we are little to help each other. When the ward has a big service project everyone, even little kids, is expected to help, not just the adults.”<sup>308</sup> Examples of big service projects that people talked about were things like building a wheelchair ramp, repaving a driveway, planting shrubs, flowers, and laying sod, or even totally remodeling a home. For these big service projects all of the materials and labor are donated by the Church. In one extreme case that warranted an article in the *Deseret News*, a woman was given \$70,000 in order to help her keep her home.

Ladd Brubaker, of the *Deseret News*, reported that a disabled widow was facing eviction when the service missionaries stepped in to help. The widow was not an LDS member but the Mormons in her ward were concerned about her. When the service (or welfare) missionary came to her door, the widow told them she was not interested in religion. The missionary told her “we’re not here about religion; we’re here to help you” (Brubaker, 2012). The welfare missionaries and the volunteers from the local ward knew that they could not do everything the widow needed on their own, so they turned to local newspapers and social networking sites asking for others to join in helping the widow. The many small donations gathered from all over the world added up quickly and \$70,000 was given to the widow’s mortgage company in order

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<sup>307</sup> Personal interview conducted March 30, 2013.

<sup>308</sup> Personal interview conducted August 28, 2012.

for her to keep her home. This story illustrates how the LDS ward configuration as a geographic region naturally includes the community a congregation resides in whether or not everyone in the area is LDS. In talking to past and present LDS bishops they convey the sense that they feel responsible for the ward—meaning both the geographic region and the congregation. Taking care of “ward members” then means taking care of a community as well as a congregation. But again, this is not unique to Mormonism.

Nancy Ammerman stated that in addition to sustaining religious traditions, building communities of fellowship are “the foundation for everything congregations do, but for most, the tasks of spiritual nurture and human caring extend beyond their own membership” (Ammerman, 2005:115). In short, congregations “understand themselves to be under obligation to ‘serve the world’ in addition to serving their own members” (ibid). This obligation to serve others as noted by the Joseph Smith quote earlier, helps Mormons develop a habit of serving others. As Robert Bellah might say, it is a *habit of the heart* which helps construct an ethic of care.

### **Ethic of Care**

In chapter one I explained that “ethic of care” is a term coined by psychologist and ethical philosopher Carol Gilligan. Gilligan named an “ethic of care” to contrast with the predominate ethic of justice as characterized by Lawrence Kohlberg’s male-biased in research (Reese, 1996:259). Gilligan’s 1982 work, *In a Different Voice*, called attention to the way in which women’s voices were absent and showed how including a woman’s perspective added rich insight into the human development of ethics. Her work showed how women make choices in which they consider relationships and the needs of others while attending to their own personal needs. While Gilligan felt that an ethic of care was an innate trait especially prevalent in women, I argue that it can also be a learned trait and that Mormons learn an ethic of care through

service to others through Church callings. In this sense clergy both constructs and facilitates acts of care.

As detailed throughout this work, the LDS Church is led by lay clergy. Current LDS leaders tend to eschew theological discussion, and instead opt for devotional or homiletic texts. As discussed in chapter five, the homiletic texts produced through General Conference lean toward emphasizing themes of family and care rather than theological discussions. Historian Matthew Bowman theorizes that after the theological disputes over evolution in the 1930s, the church decided to leave theology alone rather than risk potential doctrinal schism (2012:228). Perhaps in an effort to further ensure against schisms, the correlation movement within the Church helped further insure doctrinal uniformity. Correlation, combined with the plethora of devotional texts that the Church generates, enabled Mormons to view their faith “as a way of life and a system of ethical behavior rather than a theological argument” (ibid: 229). As this system of ethical behavior is re-contextualized back into the social context of congregation, elements from Church doctrine also become part of the structuring set of dispositions that ultimately underpin the *habitus* of care. Although dated, an example of the way Church doctrine is accessed can be found in Eugene England’s work (1986).

Eugene England, a BYU English professor writes of his personal experience in coming to know the “truth” of the gospel by teaching it in Sunday school. He states that he knows everyone can have the chance to know God through the performance of Church duties. He emphasizes that it is not the theory of the gospel that reveals the truth of its teachings--it is the experience of living it. “I have come to know the ministering of angels because I have done my duty in temple attendance” and filled callings in the Church (1986:33). In other words, it is not the abstract, but the concrete, the ritual of doing, that gives meaning to the lives of Mormons. Although England

does not state it as such, his comments are a clear example of the dialectic between ritual and belief.

The phenomenon of ritual preceding belief is not uncommon, and not unique to Mormonism. Classical sociologist Émile Durkheim states that this is an “elementary form” of all religion, and his works show how ritual is prior to belief (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]:232). He states that it is only through movement (what England would call performance of Church duties) that a group becomes aware of itself “and that, in consequence, makes it be” (ibid). Through tangible action and reaction, these movements then become a symbol, or representation of the group that helped form them. For Durkheim, ritual is the origin of belief, and also the electric stimulus that prompts a collective effervescence, the transformation of the everyday into the sacred (Durkheim 1995 [1912]:217-18; Bellah, 2006:151). In Mormonism this collective effervesce is meeting together in congregations and providing service to one another through callings (duty). The ritual of enacting an ethic of care becomes the Church, in the sense that church is a body of bodies, a family of families caring for each other.

William James noted that “[I]n critically judging of the value of religious phenomena, it is very important to insist on the distinction between religion as an individual personal function, and religion as an institutional, corporate, or tribal product” (2009 [1902]:193). He explains by stating that when groups of like believers or sympathizers organize themselves, “they become ecclesiastical institutions with corporate ambitions of their own” (ibid). Becoming institutions with corporate ambitions is, in other words, a tribal (group or collective) product.

The figure below illustrates how the group of like believers (in this case Mormons) organize themselves around callings, rituals of care, belief, and congregation in a combined institution of an ethic of care. As discussed above, the rituals of care can be anything from

temple proxy baptisms to sending someone flowers when they have a death in the family. As I stated in chapter one, Émile Durkheim’s theorized that ritual is prior to belief (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]:232). I have shown how performing rituals of care enables Mormons to form emotive bonds with those they care for. As illustrated in the interview snippets above both performing acts of care and service and receiving care from others prompts feelings of belonging and facilitates religious beliefs of care. These religious beliefs are the cornerstone of many Christian traditions as reflected in the commandment to “love thy neighbor.” What this chapter has also shown is the extent to which Mormons practice that command to love their neighbor.

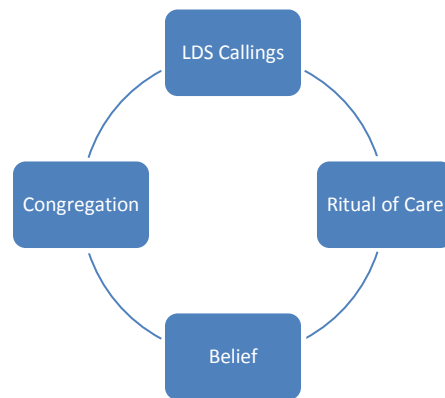


Figure 7.1 Ethic of care

The LDS ethic of care can also be thought of as a worldview of service--a Christ-like love for others. One man told me that Jesus Christ was the ultimate example of true service, and as Christians we are to follow His example. “We (Mormons) just try to exemplify Him and His life, by loving everyone and taking care of them.”<sup>309</sup> Yet in order for this worldview to have a very practical application, people need to have some codified system for offering service. The lay leadership positions of callings help people learn how to serve and how to be served. Several

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<sup>309</sup> Personal interview conducted June 29, 2012.



people told me that having someone serve them helped them learn to better serve others. Doing service on a consistent basis helped develop a habit of service.

“People make themselves to be what they are through the activities in which they habitually are engaged (Kohler, 1995:132)”. Mormons learn to practice an ethic of care within their Church callings (lay leadership positions) and by performing Church duties. Mormons learn to help each other and by providing support to one another they come to feel more connected. One woman I was interviewing kept using the word family in reference to both congregation and her extended family (husband, parents, and siblings). I asked her to clarify if she was talking about her family or her congregation. She replied “Both! They are interconnected. You can apply both to each other. You can be in a ward family and learn how to interact with people there, and implement that at home. So, your own personal family takes precedence over a ward family, they are your immediate family, but the principles carry over either way.”<sup>310</sup>

### Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to show in this chapter is how service, and an ethic of care, is a big part of the lived experience, the practiced faith of Mormons. While Mormons do focus a great amount of their attention inward, they still address the larger community’s needs (including non-members). Their focus of service and care includes addressing spiritual (including temple salvific ritual) as well as material needs. This habit of service as undergirded by the duty of callings helps construct an ethic of care as an essential element of the LDS lived religion, and because it becomes part of the everyday living of Mormon faith, serving others becomes inseparable from Mormon identity.

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<sup>310</sup> Personal interview conducted March 24, 2013.

One could say that the LDS ethic of care is a code of conduct. Codified systems of care, such as home and visiting teaching, put Mormons in caregiving relationships with each other that are typically occupied by family (and kinship group) members. These relationships help Mormons practice the ideal of care assumed to be inherent in consanguineous kinship networks and create cohesive bonds with their fellow congregants. The bureaucratic structure of church callings makes caring for others virtually mandatory. Mormons spend a great deal of time caring for others both inside and outside the Church. Studies show that while Mormons volunteer a lot of their time to fellow congregants, volunteerism is not exclusive to other Mormons. The Church's welfare system is well-known for its ability to respond to global natural disasters

For a number of different reasons (divorce, singlehood, being shunned by family due to conversion, etc.), there are Mormons who find themselves outside of the heteronormative nuclear family model. In many cases, due to the codified systems of care, ward members care for these individuals in ways that their own family would have. The act of caring and being cared for creates a bond that allows individuals to feel loved and accepted by their *ward family*. Similar to the way individuals believe they are obligated to care for their kin and family, having a system of care as part of a church calling makes the act of care for others a duty as well.

Temple rituals such as proxy baptisms and weddings (sealings) solidify and extend existing kinship networks. Doing temple work for one's own kin requires genealogical research which often creates levels of respect and reverence for ancestors. Doing temple work for others is an act of service which creates kinship-like relationships with those for whom the work is done and those who do temple work together (i.e. congregation members). Therefore, just as Durkheim theorized, ritual is prior to belief--performing rituals on behalf of ancestors therefore influences belief about ancestors and family.

As illustrated above, other religious traditions also have codified structures of care. This study does not intend to make any claims about codified structures of care being unique to Mormons; it only claims to show how codified structures of care within the LDS religion may influence LDS ward cohesiveness. This study also shows that codified structures of care may be responsible for people extending care to people they are not actually very fond of. In other words, this study illustrates ways that people take care of others out of duty rather than out of friendship. While it is a “Christian duty” to care for the poor, the LDS duty to care for others includes that on a general basis, but strives to become closer to caring for others as if they were kin which may differ from other traditions’ codified structures of care.

I now turn to look at the larger picture and discuss how all the pieces of the symbolic system of family come together as ward family in the final two chapters that follows.

## Chapter Eight:

### Ward Family: The Lived Experience of the Symbolic System of Family

#### Hymn # 308: Love One Another<sup>311</sup>

From my New Jersey field notes: *The New Jersey couple had invited me over to their house for dinner. It was a kind gesture that I readily accepted. Together we fixed a simple dinner of salad and left over lima bean soup with sauerkraut and then sat at their comfortable dining table and ate. The couple told me how the Missionaries from the east coast (and states other than Utah) liked eating with them because the foods they served were new and different for them; yet I was struck by how familiar the foods were. The side dishes of pickled vegetables, pickled herring, olives and crackers reminded me of my grandmother's kitchen. We talked about how Brother Nelson had grown and canned the beans for the dilled bean dish and that he used his mother's recipe for the mustard pickles with cauliflower and pearl onions. I wondered if it was the same recipe that my grandmother had used—it had always been one of my favorites. There were lots of other small things we had in common and talked together very easily. I mentioned that, and wondered aloud if they found many people in New Jersey that shared such traits (as well as a fondness for mustard pickles) and they said "no! It is our common Utah heritage." As we ate and chatted I began to get a deeper sense of how Mormon families are connected to each other.*

A common heritage, shared traits, and favorite foods are some of the things that link members of a family or kinship network together. Often, sharing those things helps people feel connected on some level. But there are times when despite sharing these things with a family group, members feel left out. This chapter explores how *ward families* have some of the same darker sides that nuclear families have—instances where not all family members are recognized and embraced equally, and how in some extreme cases, family members are actively excluded.

#### Who Is Left Out?

Mormons are very proud of the hierarchical and rotating configuration of lay leadership that governs and runs their church and local congregations. They feel this arrangement allows for God to be at the helm rather than a person. Some of the Mormons I interviewed, however, do see some drawbacks to this structure. One man who had served in many leadership positions within

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<sup>311</sup> LDS hymn #308. This hymn references the commandment to “love one another.” This is one of the few hymns written by a Mormon for Mormons. The text of the hymn reveals the thought that one shows that they are a follower of Christ by loving others.

the church told me that “having a lay ministry means that you didn’t get formal training, that you learn mostly by example. You’re expected to take the instructional manuals and do the best you can. And the Church generally does that well, but unfortunately there are some wards that don’t quite get this notion of inclusiveness and working diligently to make sure that everybody feels comfortable.”<sup>312</sup> While one could assume that this man, and others like him, is concerned with welcoming the stranger, the concern is actually often directed inwardly. In other words, Mormons are not always good at welcoming other Mormons.

Stacey, a woman in her mid-thirties, told me about a time when she and her sister were attending LDS Church services in another state. They had been lifelong members, but had not always gone to church. Their church attendance had been sporadic, but on one particular Sunday the sisters, then in their early twenties, decided they should attend services that day. They thought things had gone fairly well until later in the week when they received a letter from the bishop. In the letter the bishop told the girls that they should not come back unless they were willing to attend church regularly. “Well, that’s all it took for my sister, to be done with the church. She told me ‘they don’t want me there, so I’m not going back’ and she didn’t. It’s really too bad because I think Church would have been a good thing for her. The Church is true, but sometimes the people aren’t.”<sup>313</sup>

Within the interviews I found several references to what Mormon historian Claudia Bushman referred to as “clannishness” (2008:135).<sup>314</sup> While Bushman recognized this problem in reference to Mormons welcoming the stranger, I found it to be mentioned more as an insider problem. Mormons told me of being in a ward (and congregation) that had developed what they called “cliques.” These small groups included the top leaders in the congregation and all of the

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<sup>312</sup> Personal interview conducted June 30, 2012.

<sup>313</sup> Personal interview conducted September 17, 2012.

<sup>314</sup> Bushman is a member of the LDS Church and a historian who specialized in LDS history.

top callings simply rotated through the clique. For instance within the women's callings the Relief Society (RS) President would be released and called to be the new Primary President, the outgoing Primary President would be released and called to be the new Young Women's President, the outgoing Young Women's President would be released and called to be the new Relief Society President. The same was happening within the men's callings. Eventually there were only a handful of couples carrying the weight of the ward leadership—not because there are not enough committed members, but because only a small handful of people have been given the chance to be leaders; eventually only those that have previously been leaders are seen as potential leaders and no one else is given the chance. In short, there is a lack of opportunity for new people to learn to be leaders. When those I interviewed were not part of the “clique,” they felt left out. They moved out of the ward because they did not feel useful or appreciated. This only perpetuated the clique and vicious cycle of a small number of people being called repeatedly to the same positions. Several respondents mentioned this problem yet at least one man acknowledged that he knew “his clique” had been guilty of being exclusive and was not always friendly with other congregants.

Some of the lay clergy I spoke with acknowledged that the Church's focus on family may have some unintended consequences. Randy, a middle-aged man spoke about some of the lay clergy's concern over some of the unintended consequences of the Church's focus on family:

We are quite concerned that if the only talk you ever have in a ward is about the nuclear family, and about how everybody should be in that family, it just really is going to leave a lot of people out. Furthermore, it is just simply burying your head in the sand as to what reality is in this society.<sup>315</sup>

And Tracy, a divorced middle-aged woman told me about the anxiety she feels when visiting other LDS congregations.

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<sup>315</sup> Personal interview conducted June 30, 2012.

Our ward is just so accepting. There are no small groups here where people are left out; here everybody is pretty open to being friends with anyone. Sometimes the LDS culture feels like there's this tiny mold everyone is supposed to fit into. I get anxiety going to other wards--I get nervous and worry that as a divorced woman I won't be accepted.<sup>316</sup>

Part of not being accepted in a new ward is not fitting in with the ward clique. Perhaps one does not share the same love of sports, or work at the local factory which employees most of the congregation, or participate in the ward choir. All of those types of clannishness are related to a local group and the idiosyncrasies of a specific area. There is a larger type of clannishness that I discovered that seems to run through Mormonism in general based on reasons that are more ubiquitous than simply not being one of the local clique yet still carry the same repercussion of being excluded from opportunities and participation within the ward and within the religious tradition as a whole. In the course of doing interviews I found five reasons that active Mormons feel left out of LDS congregations. These reasons, listed in descending order of times mentioned, are: 1) being single (which also includes being divorced, but not widowed); 2) not having children; 3) racism; 4) gender issues; and 5) sexual orientation.

### **Singlehood**

With the strong LDS focus on the nuclear family, it is no surprise that those without children, single Mormons, or those living in family arrangements that are outside of the acceptable heteronormative model do not (to use Tracy's words) "fit the mold." A middle-aged divorced man told me that the hardest part of being a Mormon is being single. "A major point of the LDS Church is family, so, being single is really difficult."<sup>317</sup> Another man told me that because he is divorced, he feels a lot of conflict and tension around the Church's emphasis on family. He told me that "the Church's emphasis on family is very important to me, but it is also

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<sup>316</sup> Personal interview conducted August 2012.

<sup>317</sup> Personal interview conducted February 15, 2013.

difficult because I am single. I've gotten worried and anxious, even sick over it sometimes. It's hard when you come to church and everyone has their spouse or mate – it is hard to fit in sometimes and I feel lost.”<sup>318</sup> Both of these men could be described as “strong” church members, meaning that they have held important lay leadership positions, attend church regularly, and hold temple recommends.<sup>319</sup> The fact that even these “strong” and very committed members feel excluded and lost within their own church and congregation is striking.

As mentioned several times throughout this dissertation, Mormons who are not married feel like there is no place for them in the Church. They feel out of place in the congregation and often feel like their singlehood excludes them from holding certain positions. It is very rare for positions like Relief Society President, Bishop, Primary President, and the counselors to all of those positions, to be held by single Mormons, especially single women. The exception would be in singles wards, but even then the top position of bishop is held by a married man (usually brought in from another congregation/ward). While I could find no Church policy specifically excluding single members from holding those positions, it was certainly the observable cultural practice.

Historian Claudia Bushman noted that young LDS men and women who are not married by their late twenties feel like failures. At BYU marriage is viewed not just as important, but essential (2008:37). Many of the activities in the BYU wards center around getting people married. One woman told me “I met my spouse at a BYU student’s ward which had a HUGE emphasis on dating and getting married—there was just a lot of social pressure to date.”<sup>320</sup>

In a culture where marriage and family is the focus, one must have both in order to gain full social status. Having children outside of marriage is seen as breaking two cultural norms: sex

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<sup>318</sup> Personal interview conducted February 15, 2013.

<sup>319</sup> Both of these men are divorced and held lay leadership positions while they were married.

<sup>320</sup> Personal interview conducted August 10, 2012.



outside of marriage, and being a single parent. The Church views extramarital sex as sinful and unmarried women who become pregnant are encouraged by LDS Family Services (a private adoption agency) to adopt their child out to an LDS family. The Church's stance is that the child will have better opportunities when placed with "stable families" (Bushman, 2008:49).

Religious scholar Janet Fishburn notes that there are dangers in placing family in a predominate position within religious devotion. She stated that:

It involves a preference for the familiar over the unknown, the local over the universal, and treats the familiar and local as if there were absolute. When Christians direct reverence toward love of family without acknowledging the source of that love, they may imagine they are expressing reverence for Christ when they are, in fact, engaging in idolatry" (Fishburn, 1991:107).

For Mormons, placing the family in such a position not only excludes those who have never married, it alienates those who are divorced. One insightful man in his mid-thirties told me that:

For people who are single or divorced, that's one of the things they have the hardest time with in coming to church. They lost their family and they don't want to go there and feel judged. They forget the fact that they may be divorced or single they are still part of a family. They are still a brother, or a sister, they are still part of the ward family.<sup>321</sup>

### **Childless Mormons**

Mormons who have never had children, and those who do have children but the children do not live with them are another group who expressed feeling alienated from their congregation and the larger Church. There were several couples that I interviewed that either did not have children or whose children lived with other family members (or ex-spouses). One couple told me that not having kids was extremely difficult. They explained that "the ward here is good, but other people in other places have corrupted the teaching of the church into a rigidness that actually goes against the teachings. Families get torn apart as a result. That's not what this ward

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<sup>321</sup> Personal interview conducted July 26,2012

is about. But still, it is hard not having kids.”<sup>322</sup> For most the experience was so painful that even talking about it was difficult. For some it was enough to keep them from attending Church on a regular basis, or even become inactive.

The Church stresses home ritual that revolves around the family. Family Home Evening, family scripture study, and daily family prayer are all stressed in LDS literature, and general conference sermons. Family is also a common topic of general Sunday services. “At testimony meetings, adults and children often say they are grateful for the family prayer and scripture reading that unify and strengthen their families” (Bushman, 2008:45). One man told me that he found himself “tuning out” for much of the Sunday services because family was such an emphasis. One woman told me that she had not even read The Proclamation—“I didn’t have a family, so I felt like it just didn’t apply to me.”<sup>323</sup>

As mentioned in previous chapters there are other forms of Church rhetoric that make Mormons feel left out. The Church often blends family success with religious success, and ideas that being a good Mormon means being a parent. Take for example the General Conference sermon “Becoming Goodly Parents” given by Elder L. Tom Perry in October 2012 which included the theme that faithful Latter-day Saints are “goodly parents.” Family centered Mormon cosmology features a divine model of family salvation and emphasizes that the most important success human beings can achieve is to build strong and loving families (Jarvis, 2000:249).

## **Racism**

The Church’s history with racism is generally well-known. As mentioned in chapter one, the Civil Rights Act drew attention to the Church’s practice of excluding black males from the

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<sup>322</sup> Personal interview conducted July 26, 2012.

<sup>323</sup> Personal interview conducted August 28, 2012.

priesthood—a practice that was not discontinued until 1978. Some Mormons readily admit that their church was racist. One man told me that he felt that the Church was racist, but it was a racist culture--the racism was due to the mistakes of people (Church leaders at the time).<sup>324</sup> Although I interviewed very few people of color, I did hear stories of their feeling the effects of lingering racism. One person told me “in my last ward I felt objectified and stereotyped because of my color. Here, not so much, but believe me, racism is still an issue.”<sup>325</sup>

In December 2013, the *Gospel Topics* page on the Church’s official website LDS.org published a new article “Race and the Priesthood” addressing the Church’s racist history. The article opens with the following statement:

In theology and practice, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints embraces the universal human family. Latter-day Saint scripture and teachings affirm that God loves all of His children and makes salvation available to all. God created the many diverse races and ethnicities and esteems them all equally. As the Book of Mormon puts it, ‘all are alike unto God’ (<http://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>).

The article explained how Joseph Smith had ordained several black men into the priesthood and openly opposed slavery, yet, that the Church was established during a time when race divided the country. It was Smith’s successor, Brigham Young, who announced that “black men of African descent” (CJCLDS, 2013h) could not be ordained into the priesthood. The Church explained that subsequent leaders simply followed suit.

Perhaps most significant to Mormons of color, the article acknowledged that “the priesthood and temple restrictions created significant barriers...in international locations with diverse and mixed racial heritages” (ibid). The *Salt Lake Tribune* quotes a black Mormon responding to the Church’s website article as “a Christmas gift to each and every member of the church – black, white, or whatever ethnicity” (Stack, 2013d). A sermon given by Dieter F.

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<sup>324</sup> Personal interview conducted February 3, 2012.

<sup>325</sup> Personal interview conducted February 3, 2012.

Uchtdorf, a member of the Church's governing First Presidency, at the October 2013 general conference, confessed that church leaders, being human, are imperfect and "imperfect people make mistakes" (ibid). While some see this as a gift, others may find the blunt admission of fallibility threatening to their views of Church, prophet, and God. Although that issue is outside the scope of this work, it is worth noting for possible future work.

I have observed that one of the mistakes the Church leaders make is overestimating the extent of its congregational and leadership diversity. The Church website article referred to above stated that it is a modern reality that LDS congregations are racially integrated, and that the Church's lay ministry tends to facilitate integration. The article also stated that "a black bishop may preside over a mostly white congregation" (CJCLDS 2013h). As mentioned in chapter two, I observed the opposite that white men served as bishop in predominately black congregations. In all of the wards I have attended over the four years of my field research, I have seen several racially diverse wards, but have only ever seen white bishops. Given that the entire LDS Church leadership is still all male and predominately white, the Church still has a lot of work to do to correct its racist past, and its current racially biased habits.

### **Gender Issues**

Generally speaking, gender issues within the LDS Church and the exclusion of women from the priesthood is still a taboo topic. Since the 1998 "purge" wherein the LDS Church excommunicated feminist scholars such as Maxine Hanks for their outspokenness on this topic Mormons have been reluctant to openly discuss the topic. I asked one woman at an Ordain Women event if that event is part of the reason many women (and men) are still reluctant to talk about these issues. Her quick reply was "yeah, that kept us quiet for a couple of decades."<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Personal conversation dated July 31, 2013.

Professor of literature and religious studies Terryl Givens points out that the “role of women in the LDS Church is something of a paradox” (2007:202) and perhaps even “a source of conflict” (257). This conflict is apparent when women are viewed as a means to an end—specifically, as a means to the exaltation of men. In a speech given in the 2012 LDS Church broadcast “Worldwide Leadership Training” Church leader Boyd K. Packer<sup>327</sup> stated:

We are sometimes charged with being unkind to the sisters in that they do not hold the priesthood and therefore do not hold the offices that the brethren do. But it is well understood that whether or not we are exalted depends upon the sister who is at our side – the wife, the mother of our children – and no holder of the priesthood would in any way depreciate or mitigate the value and power of his wife (Packer, 2012).

Packer adds the comment that many men have a respect and reverence for their wife as their “companion in life that causes it to be that he can be exalted ultimately” (ibid).<sup>328</sup> He even went so far as to state:

I have been very careful and am very careful, to treat my wife with the respect and reverence that is due her in performing that thing that is of most worth (sic) for a woman in this life to live the gospel, to be the wife and the mother of the children of a worthy holder of the priesthood (ibid).

Ironically, this speech is a great example of the ways the Church is “unkind to the sisters” that Packer initially pointed to. Rather than soothing critics of the Church’s treatment of women, Boyd’s comments just verify their concerns.

Another area for concern for many feminist LDS women is the amount of lay leadership positions available for female congregants and missionaries—which reflects that women are excluded from the priesthood. The majority of Church leadership positions are exclusively reserved for priesthood holders (i.e. men). One young mother of four told me that the structure for ward callings is designed to discriminate against women. She has noticed that every time the

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<sup>327</sup> Packer is next in line for the position of Church president and prophet.

<sup>328</sup> By using the phrase “exalted ultimately” Packer is pointing to the LDS doctrine that states that only those who are married will be allowed into the highest level of heaven.

Church handbooks (which provide instructions for callings) are reissued (latest revision is 2010) callings which previously had been gender neutral have been made male specific. For example, prior to 2010 the calling of Sunday School Secretary could be filled by either a man or a woman, but the 2010 revised handbook states that the position is to be held by a priesthood holder. Women in the “Ordain Women” movement find such trends disturbing. However, other LDS women I have talked to were unaware of the changes and seemed unconcerned.

As shown by the 2013 study conducted by Evans, Curtis, and Cnaan “Volunteering Among Latter-Day Saints,” women make up a little more than one half of LDS congregations, yet their rate of religious volunteer hours are substantially less than men. As mentioned earlier, when I questioned the researchers of that study they stated that there was no significant difference, but their explanation of the difference in hours did not match with my observations-- their data however did. The average age of the study respondents was 50. This means that there are no young children at home that might keep a woman at home more (as the researchers explained). It does however reveal how older women have less and less responsibilities within the Church. In talking to a spokesperson for the “Ordain Women” movement she verified the fact that often young women with children are called to serve in positions that serve children. For instance, a young mother is almost always called to be the primary president. However, as women get older there are even fewer positions for them considering the limitations already in place. The spokesperson told me that sometimes a bishop will “invent” callings in order to give everyone in the congregation a job. By “invent” she clarified that they are positions that are not in the handbook (meaning not necessary for the maintenance of the congregation) but something for a congregant to do to make them feel useful. Examples of these types of callings are the

person who hands out the program before Sacrament meeting, a door greeter, blood drive coordinator, activities clean-up committee, etc.<sup>329</sup>

The majority of Mormon women I have talked with are comfortable with not having the priesthood and are happy with their level of participation in the ward (vis a vis Church callings). Most state that they feel “empowered” when their opinion is sought after in Church decisions (chapter three). Some, however, bristle at merely being asked to give their input rather than being given responsibility.

This is a topic that warrants much more consideration than the scope of this work allows. Especially given that the Ordain Women movement is still in its beginning stages, it is likely that in the future more and more women will be willing to speak out about gender inequality. The Church’s response to this movement will be well worth watching.

### **Sexual Orientation**

Very similar to gender issues, many Mormons are timid about discussing issues of sexual orientation. In a church where only heteronormative unions are recognized, those who do not conform to that model are left out or pushed out. Just as the Church was once racially prejudiced, it also discriminates and punishes on the basis of sexual orientation (Bushman, 2008:124). Also, just as with gender issues, issues of sexuality are also a source of conflict. Historian Claudia Bushman noted that Mormons feel issues of sexual orientation are connected to fundamental Church teachings and commandments; “They wish to avoid hurting those caught in these crosscurrents, but the struggle inevitably introduces strains into Mormon life” (2008:129).

In 1968 the Church made engaging in “homo-sexual acts” a sin for which one could be excommunicated. In 1976 the phrase “homo-sexual acts” was changed to “homosexuality;” and

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<sup>329</sup> Private phone conversation from December 16, 2013.

in 1995 “The Proclamation” implicitly decried homosexual relationships (Bushman, 2008:125). “The Proclamation” clearly states that “gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” (ibid) and stresses that marriage is between a man and a woman. In 2008 the Church was integral in the success of California’s Marriage Protection Act—Proposition 8. Although Mormons made up only two percent of California’s population, they volunteered and contributed more than \$20 million to the fund, including a \$1 million donation from Alan C. Ashton the grandson of former Church president David O. McKay and co-founder of WordPerfect.<sup>330</sup> Mormons all over the United States were pressured into supporting the fight for Proposition 8; therefore, much of the \$20 million raised came from Mormons outside of California. The Church’s willingness to play such a major public role in organizing a fight against homosexual marriage is significant.

LDS doctrine places a great emphasis on gender roles as an essential element in mortal, premortal, and eternal identity and purpose (Givens, 2004:123). As a result, sex and sexuality are also part of that identity and purpose. Mormons expect that gender and sexuality (and sexual reproduction) will continue into the eternities. “Mormons associate the procreative power not just with God’s power to engender life, but with human potential to be parents in the eternal realms” (Givens, 2004:124). It could be said that issues of sexual orientation trigger a very large scale identity crisis not just for individuals, but for the Church as a whole as it brings individual purpose and the nature of God into question.

Anthropologist Melvyn Hammarberg noted that identity as a Mormon is centered upon kinship relations that link generations of living and dead family members together eternally (2008:185). Family is not just the cornerstone of society, but the foundation of the eternities. As such, in Mormon thought then it is not a stretch to say that stepping outside the heteronormative

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<sup>330</sup> Perry and Cronin, 2012:96.



family model puts the individual and the kinship network at risk—a most serious threat to the family unit (189).

Generally speaking I found that the Mormons I interviewed did not mention issues of sexual orientation. I acknowledge that none of my questions targeted sexuality specifically, so a lack of comments on this subject could be due to the format of the questions. This is not to say, however, that Mormons are not aware of how members who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender or transsexual are excluded from their congregations. Some Mormons are actually very aware of how fellow congregants are excluded; like those who formed the “Mormons Building Bridges” movement.

The “Mormons Building Bridges” movement is focused on bringing awareness to this issue as well as reaching out to those who have been excluded due to their sexual orientation. The Church does not sponsor this group, yet it makes no moves against it either. Mormons Building Bridges was established in May of 2012 and a few weeks later, 300 members marched in the Salt Lake City gay pride parade<sup>331</sup> “to show their support of LGBT people” (Lyon, 2012). The group included men, women, and children dressed in their Sunday best. One woman carried a sign with words from an LDS Children’s song: “I’ll walk with you, I’ll talk with you; That’s how I’ll show my love for you” (Lyon, 2012). The group’s presence made a big impact on the parade’s spectators and participants who were reportedly moved to tears as they marched by.

In February of 2012 the Church launched a new website addressing the issue of same sex attraction. The website, [www.mormonsandgays.org](http://www.mormonsandgays.org), contains a collection of conversations from both gay and straight Mormons. The tenor of the conversations is that you can be gay and still be a Mormon, yet even the name of the website reinforces a binary and reflects the LDS

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<sup>331</sup> Groups in Seattle and New York City also marched in those city’s gay pride parades that year. In 2013 the group grew larger and

heteronormative mindset. The following statement included on the site simply solidifies that binary:

On a public relations perspective it would be easier for the Church to simply accept homosexual behavior. That we cannot do, for God's law is not ours to change. There is no change in the Church's position of what is morally right. But what is changing—and what needs to change—is to help Church members respond sensitively and thoughtfully when they encounter same-sex attraction in their own families, among other Church members, or elsewhere ([www.mormonsandgays.org](http://www.mormonsandgays.org)).<sup>332</sup>

The conflation of gender, temple marriage, and eternal progression creates a double bind for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Mormons. On one hand they are children of God (literal spirit-children) yet on the other they are excluded from the presence of God in the after-life since they are excluded from temple marriage (Hammarberg, 2008:229). It is a bind that will not be easily resolved without deep re-consideration of LDS doctrine.

All five of the preceding areas of exclusion are possible topics for further study, and obviously I have just barely touched on each topic. Each of these areas has a relationship to how family is understood, and how certain constructions of family are normative. While some research exists in each of these areas, there are still many unanswered questions and unexplored phenomena. For example, as I thought about how certain groups are excluded, I wondered what effect the new lower age limits of LDS missionaries, and more women serving missions, would have on issues of singlehood. I wondered if having more women serving missions would encourage seeing women as more than their prescribed role as wife and mother. I also wonder what affect the Ordain Women movement will have on LDS lay leadership and if there will be any changes in women's programs allowing them more opportunities for leadership (with or without ordination).

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<sup>332</sup> Accessed from [www.mormonsandgays.org](http://www.mormonsandgays.org) December 6, 2012.

### Strict Churches are Strong Churches

In the discussion above I have illustrated how the LDS Church can be exclusive rather than inclusive. This, and the insistence of conformance to specific codes of conduct and the huge time demand on its members make the Church a “strict church.” Strict churches employ codes of conduct and identity markers as aids in maintaining social and religious boundaries (Shipps 2001:69; Marks & Beal 2008). Sociologist Laurence Iannaccone argued that codes of conduct create strong churches because less committed members are screened out stimulating higher participation rates among remaining adhering members (Iannaccone 1994:1180). Higher levels of participation may increase overall religiosity.

Overall I found that Mormons tend to show high levels of religiosity through the amount of time they spend in Church related activities, and are socially embedded in their religious tradition. In his work discussing the connection between social embeddedness and levels of religiosity, sociologist Samuel Stroope noted that while data indicates that people who are more socially rooted in their church do exhibit a higher level of religiosity, it is also possible that embeddedness is equally influenced by religiosity (Stroope, 2012:293). This is a rational choice argument that not all sociologists agree with.

Sociologist Nancy Ammerman questioned the implications of religious vitality and stated that while models of strict churches are plausible, one must not overlook the cultural costs and benefits of participation in religious institutions (Ammerman, 1997: 121). Rational choice theories suggest that people will act rationally, weighing the costs and benefits of their level of commitment. Beliefs and commitments change as circumstances change causing people to recalculate the balance of commitment and maximum benefit (Aldridge, 2000:97). Sociologist Rodney Stark sees these costs and benefits as a way of maintaining sufficient tension, without

which religious movements such as the LDS Church cease to grow (Stark 2001a:237). On the other hand the research of social scientists Rick Phillips and Ryan Cragun showed that while the LDS Church does show high rates of growth and conversion, it also has a high rate of defection (2013:87). Phillips and Cragun reported that from 1972 to 2000 24.7% of LDS Church members living outside of what they call the “Mormon Cultural Region” (Utah, southeast Idaho, Wyoming’s Star Valley and parts of northern Arizona) had left the church (2013:87). That rate of decline would suggest that for many, the costs outweigh the benefits, and that the costs outside of Utah and the Mormon region are higher. It would also suggest that members would rather leave than be fully committed, returning to our initial statement that strict churches are strong churches with highly committed members.

My research and other studies indicate that overall, Mormons are happy in their religious communities. A 2012 Pew report *Mormons in America: Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society* survey showed that Mormons are more positive than the general public about their communities as a good place to live. The survey found that 92% of Mormons rated their communities as either “excellent” or “good” compared to 81% of the general public. In the Mormon group 52% rated their community as excellent and 40% rated it as good. For Mormons living in the western part of the U.S., 55% rated their communities as excellent but for Mormons living in Utah, the percentage was 71% (Pew, 2012a:3). The survey also showed that Mormons have a higher level of commitment than many other religious groups. For instance more than two-thirds of Mormons identify as highly religious; 77% say they attend religious services at least once a week; 83% say they pray daily; and 77% say they wholeheartedly believe in all of their Church’s teachings. This may indicate that those who stay are committed and happy with the benefits of staying in a strict church. In Mormonism where congregations are based on

geographic boundaries, LDS members' communities contains their fellow congregants, therefore if they are happy in their Church, they are probably happy in their community. The opposite could also be true. Those who leave may be leaving the geographic area, not just the Church.

Phillips and Cragun's research found that Utah is now at its lowest saturation point of LDS members. "In 1930 almost half of all Mormons lived in Utah. Today the figure stands at 13.5%" (2013:78). Roughly 58% of Utahns are Mormon (Pond 2009). They suggest that a low saturation of Mormons may actually be good for LDS congregations as it will force them to pay more attention to ways to gain and retain members. My findings indicate that the more diverse a congregation is, the easier it is for them to accept others. Members in diverse congregations are more likely to accept insiders who are less committed as well as outsiders; they become a more welcoming ward. My research indicates that being a welcoming ward is essential to being a cohesive *ward family*.

The Salt Lake ward is an example of a welcoming ward. They welcomed the marginalized, took care of the poor within their area (both Mormon and non-Mormon), and embraced the outsider. Newcomers in the ward were just as warmly welcomed as visiting church dignitaries. I watched the women's group make baby blankets for a Muslim woman and helped her learn English despite knowing that she would never convert to Mormonism.<sup>333</sup> The day that the Muslim woman returned to church with her newborn daughter, the joy was palpable. The woman and her other two daughters were dressed in full hijabs as they always were, and the infant was beautifully swathed in the blankets made by the ward's women's group. Both men and women gathered around the Muslim family to hug and congratulate them and coo over the beautiful baby with her shock of black hair. In the course of interviews I heard expressions of sympathy and concern for a convicted murderer, the person he killed, and the families of both. I

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<sup>333</sup> In a totally unexpected development, the Muslim woman was baptized into the LDS Church in the fall of 2013.

saw a very young and pregnant un-wed teen embraced rather than shunned. I listened as a woman in jeans bore her testimony during Sacrament meeting thanking the congregation for welcoming her with open arms when the rest of the world had rejected her, and then in turn, heard members of the congregation thank her for inspiring them with her courage.

These examples in themselves are not remarkable. Such acts of care can be found in many Christian (and non-Christian) congregations; the fact that the members of this congregation were in constant flux is what made these actions remarkable. It was not a case of the same group of people led by an inspired leader taking care of a few poor in the area. Often it was individuals acting on their own. Due to the transient nature of the ward, both the care takers and those being cared for changed on a continual basis. It was as if caring for one another was a code of conduct expected of everyone in the ward. The efforts of the caregivers were not extolled; both the caregivers and those being cared for often remained anonymous. In other words, names of those giving or receiving aid were not the topic of gossip. Conversation among the congregants seemed to focus on how to care for those in their midst rather than gossiping about those who were struggling. Conversely, while all of these examples were found in one LDS ward, does not mean that they will be found in all LDS wards. Individuals and congregations always adopt or discard ideologies on their own terms.

Sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox examined family and gender attitudes among conservative Protestants in his 2004 work *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands*, and found that “ideologies and norms produced by religious institutions can and do influence the attitudes of their members” (76). Wilcox acknowledged that a collectively produced culture includes a range of factors that people adopt or discard as they are integrated into the culture that produced the ideology so that “even when religious institutions

produce clear and consistent messages regarding family and gender, these messages are not likely to be completely accepted by their adherents” (75). I would agree Wilcox. I found that although most Mormons accept the general idea of family and gender as presented in the Church’s ideologies such as “The Proclamation” they tend to adopt a broader idea of family than what they are presented with.

### What is family?

As I looked back on my interview transcripts I wondered if I should have asked, what is family? It is a question that, in retrospect, I wish I would have asked my interviewees, yet realized that in every interview the respondents were in fact telling me what family meant to them. This caused me to consider my own perspective on family.

The writing of the dissertation serendipitously coincided with the arrival of my first grandchild. Sitting outside the nursery window at the hospital waiting for the first glimpse of my granddaughter, I reflect on what it means to name a person or a group as “family.” I sit on one end of a long couch and my first husband sits at the other end. He is the father of my sons, and once we all counted ourselves as a family, but now it seems we have been reduced to fragments of family that no longer fit together. I find that I cherish those who wait with me, even this man who in ways has become a stranger, and miss those who are noticeably absent.

Like many other contemporary families, my granddaughter arrives into a post-modern tribe which has its share of deconstructed and reconstructed groupings of in-laws, exes, stepchildren, half-siblings, foster children, misfits, and rebels; but those of us who were on hand to welcome this new baby into the world, happily claim her as ours. Of course it is awkward, I never know what to say to my first husband’s second wife, and I miss my second husband more than I should, but in that moment it feels perfectly imperfect--we are family. It is easy to

welcome this beautiful baby girl into the group of individuals I call family; and even though I really do not know her yet, I already love her. Kin and blood relations, especially when they arrive packaged in beautiful new baby forms, are easy to accept and love. Often, maintaining such relationships over time takes work, but I found that congregations such as the Salt Lake ward accept and love their new members just as readily. Yet, one still has to be recognized as a member of the family.

Although I always felt welcomed into the LDS wards and congregations I visited, I never felt what I heard others describe as a deep bond of being part of a *ward family*. I did feel a level of connection with those in the congregations I visited and I was even fortunate enough to make some meaningful friendships. Perhaps I never felt part of the *ward family* because I did not have a calling in the ward, which of course, as a non-member I was not eligible for. It was, however, most likely due to my conscious decision as a researcher to deliberately hold myself at a distance so I could maintain the balance of being an objective insider/outsider. I do not feel that this was a hindrance in any way; the distance allowed me to concentrate more on observing than participating.

Living within the ward boundaries allowed me to see the extent that being a Mormon is a lifestyle. While I lived the lifestyle very closely, as a non-member there were some lifestyle habits, like temple attendance and completely conforming to the word of wisdom that I did not participate in. Overall I always felt more like a friend of the *ward family* rather than a ward family member, but then again, I never felt like a total stranger either. The congregation was relatively small (about 300 members of which 100 to 150 are active), which aided in allowing a familial familiarity. However, given the high rate at which members moved in and out of the ward it would have been very easy for the small Salt Lake congregation to act more like a very



large one in which members do not really get to know one another well and so do not form familial type bonds as easily.

It is a rare individual who does not count someone, even if it is only one individual rather than a collection of individuals, as family. It seems that even those with no known blood relatives are known to state that someone in their life is “like family.” Sometimes this family is a close friend, sometimes even a beloved pet, but with many it is a particular group of people which they feel radically welcomes them into their presence and accepts and loves them, warts and all. I saw this ability to radically welcome others in the Salt Lake ward. One woman told me: “we just accept everyone, the ones with bad attitudes, the ones who are in terrible straits financially, the ones with mental issues, everyone, they are all just are accepted!”<sup>334</sup> Some believe that choosing to love those who arrive into our lives outside of blood kin bonds takes a bit of work, others state that continuing to love blood kin is the hardest task of all. I marveled at the woman who told a group of fellow Mormons “I love you, I don’t know you yet, but I already love you.”<sup>335</sup>

While there is a saying that you can choose your friends, but not your family, in the end, we actually do choose our family by how we continue to relate to them and care for them, and sometimes our friends become our family. It is true regardless of whether the family is blood kin, a close friend, or an entire congregation. It is not the structure of the family unit, regardless of its size, that is the crucial element in family-- it is the structure of care we extend and reciprocally receive. As those I interviewed reported, the feeling of family is in knowing someone will be there to lend a hand when life gets hard; it is the consistent warm and gracious welcome that

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<sup>334</sup> Personal interview conducted June 29, 2012.

<sup>335</sup> From field notes dated March 28, 2013.

makes you feel “at home” and “like family;” it is a shared history as well as a shared future—all of these things prompt Mormons to name their fellow congregants as family.

### **Ward Family**

*Field notes February 2013. About once a quarter the Relief Society will host a special evening for the women in the congregation. Usually this includes a light dinner consisting of dishes women bring to share, and a guest speaker. On this particular evening the guest speaker begins by saying "hello - I love you! I don't know you, but if I wait to know you before I love you it is too late. I have to love you first and get to know you later."*

As previously stated, the symbolic system of family as a whole may be what enables Mormons to think of their congregations as their *ward family*. In the previous chapters I have presented each of the individual components of the model for the Symbolic System of Family. While each component can be considered individually, it was clear in the discussions that some pieces (e.g. marriage) are present in more than one component. Overall, there are threads such as family, kinship, and care that are woven throughout each component. To illustrate, if we begin with the thread of kinship networks in the component of *Family Units* it could lead to eternal families in the *LDS Church* component; eternal families are woven together with religious values in *Society*, and all three of the components create the fabric of *Care*--caring for others as if they were kin in the extended kin network of the human family. All of the threads woven together create the tapestry of *ward family* where everyone is indeed, brothers and sisters. Of course, there are also instances where the interlocking threads are seen as barriers that keep people out rather than bring them together as discussed earlier in this chapter.

While many Mormons find a “home” in their congregation and a “family” in their fellow congregants, it does not work that well for everyone. Many LDS men and women have left the Church feeling that its model of family is divisive rather than uniting. Although the Church

claims to have a “rapid and sustained growth rate” (LDS.org)<sup>336</sup> a recent study found that the Mormons are leaving the Church at a very similar rapid and sustained rate. Researchers Phillips and Cragun reported that the Church loses members at a fairly sustained rate of one to one—that is for every convert there is one apostate (Phillips and Cragun, 2013:88). In the 60s and 80s many left the Church over race and feminist issues; and in extreme cases, feminists and others were excommunicated. *Salt Lake Tribune* journalist Peggy Fletcher-Stack reported that LDS general authority Marlin Jensen, the faith's outgoing church historian, blames pop culture and the internet for current defections. For instance, by using the internet it is easy to discover that Joseph Smith was a polygamist and is reported to have married girls as young as 14, or that some allege that bits of the *Book of Mormon* may have been plagiarized from a novel (Stack, 2012a). Although the Church has never made an effort to hide or obscure this information, it can be startling to members (ibid). At the 2013 Sunstone Symposium one man told me that those types of things made him question the Church’s credibility.

Although many leave, or are excommunicated, some return. I spoke with one woman who has officially left, only to return to be re-baptized three times. While she was uneasy about discussing it, my hunch is that her sense of self and her marriage (she was married in the temple) was so embedded in the Church that leaving was just too much of a personal identity crisis. In the case of previously excommunicated Maxine Hanks, she said that she asked to be allowed to return and be re-baptized in 2012. Hanks, who had been excommunicated for her feminist based scholarship, stated that after studying other faiths and even getting to the point of priestly ordination within another tradition, she recognized the value and power of the LDS lay leadership within the LDS Christian community and asked to return (Stack, 2012b). While these

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<sup>336</sup> From the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Newsroom undated posting <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/topic/church-growth> link within the [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org) official Church website. Accessed August 13, 2013.

isolated incidents illustrate how it is possible that even those with radically opposing views to standard Church rhetoric and gender roles can reconcile their belief and their feminist views and maintain (or even return to) their membership in the Church. Of course, it is also the case that many who leave over such issues never return.

When those who find Church elements divisive leave, the congregation that stays tends to be stronger. As discussed above, and noted on page 20, sociologist Laurence Iannaccone believes that when people are unhappy with their church and leave, it actually reinforces the congregation and makes for strong churches (Iannaccone, 1994). Sociologist Gerald Marwell, however, argued that Iannaccone's use of average commitment and participation rates as an indicator of church *strength* is problematic. Marwell believed that a more complete, and perhaps more accurate, picture of congregational activity uses total (not average) contributions (time and money) as a measure of strength. Further, Marwell questioned the ability to find any good ways to evaluate strength when comparing religious traditions (Marwell, 1996).

Taking into account Marwell's objections to Iannaccone's theory, a strong church (or congregation) may consist of people who are better able to reconcile conflicting Church and personal beliefs, and those who are not able to reconcile these differences have left. It may be that those who stay are more personally attached in ways that are difficult to measure or observe. We may further speculate that those who stay can successfully negotiate their religious and social identities, and overall, are able to be more committed Church members. So, in regard to this one aspect or measure of religiosity, we may conclude that whether the congregants stay because they believe, or leave because they do not, the result is a more committed and more cohesive congregation. Being a "strong church" may make it easier to think of fellow congregants as "family," but that is not to say that that being a "family" comes easily.

Being a congregational family demands a great deal from its members. These religious groups are often tightly knit together, and, as we have seen, “Mormons often describe their wards as a sort of extended family” (Bowman, 2012:217). Like extended family *ward families* depend on each other for care. I observed that in the opening prayer for one sacrament meeting, the speaker included the phrase “thank you for our ward family, bless us that we can continue to be of service to each other.”<sup>337</sup> Borrowing from anthropologist’s David M. Schneider, who suggests that kinship is not a function of reproduction and procreation, but a cultural and religious function (2010 [1984]:95,183), I would like to suggest that the LDS designation of *ward family* is a special type of kinship that is religiously and culturally produced.

In his 2007 work *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, Schneider argued that defining kinship only as biological reproduction overlooks important social aspects of community. He further stated that without considering the value and significance of kinship, the definition of kinship falls short of describing what he calls “the Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind” (2010 [1984]:122, 174). By using that phrase Schneider is pointing to the way that genealogical relations are the same in every culture (i.e. whether patrilineal or matrilineal) and as such, cross-cultural comparisons are possible. Further, it allows for the consideration of the “cultural formulations of what are held to be inherent, relatively inflexible conditions of the biological bases of human behavior” (174). While contemporary anthropologists may argue with Schneider’s approach, I believe it is useful in considering Joseph Smith’s approach to kinship. I argue that Joseph Smith’s idea of the human family combined with temple ritual is a lived example of Schneider’s “Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind.” In this sense, Smith’s idea of family can be compared to a *ward family* which is a smaller kinship unit of the greater human family kinship network.

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<sup>337</sup> Field notes March, 2011.

To help round out this idea I turn to Michael Palmer's 1982 dissertation on family imagery in Mormonism and American Culture. Palmer noted how the early Mormons often left their personal individual families, becoming isolated from the larger culture. Entering into Mormonism enabled them to enter into the "brotherhood of man" or the "human family" (1982:99-100). The idea of a human family is, in essence, globalizing or universalizing family.

I have observed that modern Mormons face the same cultural tensions that Palmer discussed. In chapter three I mentioned tension between biological families and the Church; for some, it may seem contradictory that those who convert into a church that has family as a focus (either early or modern Mormons), should feel that they have to choose between church and family. But these kinds of choices have long been part of the commitment mechanisms of religious groups (Kanter 1972:72-73). In her 1972 work *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective*, sociologist Rosabeth Moss Kanter stated that renunciation includes giving up competing relationships. Leaving some relationships behind is part of the detachment process which brings an anchoring and a "we-feeling" to the collective whole (73).

Perhaps attempting to resolve this tension was part of what Smith was doing when he established the idea of everyone belonging to a "human family." If converts choose to become part of a "human family" then they are in essence expanding their family rather than having to choose between biological family and Church, because in the end, everyone belongs to the "human family."

Although Palmer was referencing a historical past, the condition of being isolated is still relevant. When I interviewed Richard, a man who converted to Mormonism in his late teens, he told me that he was the only member of his family to join the Church. "I didn't have my family

in the church, so families that were in the church became like my church family. The church became the family I didn't have."<sup>338</sup> Grace, a woman who lives a great distance from any other members of her family told me that the Salt Lake ward feels like home "because it makes you so happy to go there. It's like a big family reunion where everyone is wanted, needed and loved."<sup>339</sup>

In chapter one I mentioned Al Fox, a convert in New York who felt forced to choose between the church and her family and friends. Her story was featured in the March/April 2013 edition of *LDS LIVING*, a church magazine, in the article "Finding Joy in the Gospel." The article featured five stories<sup>340</sup>, one of which is Al Fox, a young tattooed woman who was living in New York City when she was converted, and later moved to Utah. Although she does not provide details, Fox stated that after joining the Church she "lost every friend she had and was even forced to choose between the Church and her family" (Worthen, 2013:53) and talked of being harassed by co-workers. Fox explained due to her many obvious tattoos (which Mormons do not approve of), that fitting in with her new religious group was difficult due to her many obvious tattoos.<sup>341</sup> She stated that while some Mormons in Provo Utah did harshly judge her for her body art, others were accepting. "I felt so lonely, and the only people I did have were the people I went to church with on Sunday and they were like family to me" (Worthen, 2013:53).

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<sup>338</sup> Personal interview conducted August 23, 2012.

<sup>339</sup> Personal interview conducted July 6, 2012.

<sup>340</sup> This article is full of elements that could be further explored beyond the quote used. The five individuals chosen to present their stories of conversion are all individuals that are, or may be, seen as being outside the LDS norm. For instance the individuals are a black woman from war torn Sierra Leone, a Chinese man from Thailand, a heavily tattooed young white woman from New York City, a Hispanic man from Columbia, and a white male Presbyterian minister from Colorado. All but the Columbian moved to Utah after their conversion. The article mentions that the Columbian man and his family moved to the US seeking political asylum, but does not give details about what state he moved to. I suspect the article was written as an effort to present converts as being ethnically diverse and that Mormons are just like everyone else (i.e. from different countries, different religions, radical or rebellious young people, etc.). But the fact that they all moved to Utah after conversion says more about the strong emphasis on conformity and the place of Utah as the center of the religion, or the home of Mormonism in general. For now I will have to leave the deconstruction of this magazine article to other scholars but offer it as an example of the fascinating things to explore in Mormon culture.

<sup>341</sup> Although not specifically banned by the Word of Wisdom, Mormons feel that body alterations in the form of tattoos and piercings are not acceptable. Now that pierced ears are common for women, that is acceptable, but more than one piercing in each ear is not.

This sense of family is palpable even to outsiders. One Claremont Graduate University student, who is not a Mormon but visited a ward as part of a religion class assignment, noted how she felt included in a *ward family*. She writes:

I felt an overwhelming sense of being ushered with open arms *into* the family. Though my outsidership was frequently referred to, it was never with an intent to isolate me; it was more, “How wonderful that you are a part of our family for the day.” This is why I specifically worded my (essay) title, “Spending Sunday Morning *in* the Mormon Family.” Any other preposition would not convey this welcoming spirit. As for why I characterized the congregation as “the Mormon Family,” the relationships I observed between members appeared beyond the mere affection of friendship. Beyond the fact that everyone is addressed as Sister and Brother, the congregation felt close-knit and comfortable with each other. I understand that each ward is unique, just as every Mormon is an individual, but in this ward, on this Sunday, I experienced the ideal of the ward family. And yes, as I mention in my post, the bishop did use the term “ward family” while assuring the self-conscious women in the ward that they were loved and valued.<sup>342</sup>

The interviews I conducted verified that Mormon families are no different than any other family, nor are they exempt from strife and struggle. They have neither no greater, nor no less family problems than any other group. Tim B. Heaton, Kristen L. Goodman, and Thomas B. Holman discovered in their 1994 work “In Search of a Peculiar People: Are Mormon Families Really Different?” that there is little difference between Mormon and non-Mormon families in terms of marital conflict, disagreement, and interaction with kin (2001 [1994]:113). Among even the most orthodox Mormons I interviewed I found instances of non-active parents, siblings, or children. There are instances where children not only fall away, but leave the Church entirely. As mentioned in chapter three I heard stories of violent crime, domestic violence, abuse, teen pregnancy, drug use, alcoholism, and other addictions including pornography. Sometimes those I interviewed were the ones abused, or the ones that did the abusing. Some had left the church and returned, some were still not sure they ever wanted to fully return. In short, Mormon families are just as broken, and struggling with life issues just like everyone else. Similarly, it would be a

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<sup>342</sup> Personal email exchange dated April 29, 2013.



mistake to assume that *ward families* (LDS congregations) do not struggle with the same types of issues that other congregations struggle with. Neither families nor congregations are ever static.

Naturally one cannot assume that any religious tradition is static. It would also be a mistake to assume that all LDS congregations behave in the same manner as those I observed, or that all Mormons experience religion, congregation, and family in the same way. For the Salt Lake ward I observed, it may be the constant flux that helps the congregation remain committed to each other, but for other congregations the same stress may tear them apart.

Falling retention rates may indicate that the Church's goal of strengthening families is in fact not being met, or at least not the desired result of strong individuals and families equating to strong (i.e. continuous) membership. So while I would be inclined to state that the LDS bureaucratic goal of strengthening individuals and families is failing, I would say that the focus of family is having an unintended consequence. Unintended because it is only when the idea of family is made elastic and capacious, extending into Smith's vision of a "human family," that the resulting strong membership is achieved. I suggest that this unintended consequence is much more robust and remarkable—Mormon communities have often become *ward families* by enabling or encouraging individuals to accept and treat other community members as family.

It is important to note that Mormons are not the only religious tradition to form close-knit congregations that practice care for fellow congregants. I see that both LDS and Jewish people are bound together in similar ways. Both groups center around a specific text that contains specific rules for conduct: for Mormons it is the Book of Mormon, for Jews, The Torah.<sup>343</sup> Both groups have a strong shared memory of oppression and exile. For Mormons it is Brigham Young leading the pioneers out of the United States where Governor Boggs had issued an extermination

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<sup>343</sup> Naturally there are other groups centered around specific texts such as Christians who focus on the Bible, Muslims who focus on the Qur'an, etc.. I am simply offering two examples rather than implying that these are the only two groups with this type of focus.

order on all Mormons, and stories of a culture and a faith that continue to be misunderstood and marginalized. For Jews it is the story of Moshe leading the enslaved people out of Egypt, the horrors of the Holocaust, and continued anti-Semitism in the modern world. Lastly, in both groups the lines between culture and religion get blurred. Religion scholar Stephen Prothero states that Judaism is both a religion and a people. The Jewish people bind themselves together and to God through stories, law and the cultural memory of sharing stories about the Jewish people (Prothero, 2010:245-47). The LDS people bind themselves together and to God through stories of pioneer ancestors, through proxy temple ritual for those and other ancestors, and by spending incredible amounts of time together as a ward. Both groups practice home rituals which focus on family. Jewish families observe weekly Shabbat services and LDS families hold weekly Family Home Evenings.

Of course there are many other Christian groups besides Mormons that focus on family and care for each other within their congregation. When I did fieldwork for my Master's degree I saw how one very large African-American congregation supported each other in their community as well as their church. The Trinity United Church of Christ, and other black churches, have many programs that serve their congregants such as support groups for domestic violence, free legal advice, day care centers, tutoring, drug and alcohol recovery, just to name a few. Black church members bind themselves together as congregation in ways they are not able to do in their communities. In his 1985 work *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, theologian Peter J. Paris noted that black churches have always had a profound concern for the bitter and painful realities of black existence in America. He noted that the black church provides a space where its members can achieve a level of independence and social status that is not possible outside the church such as black men in position of power and leadership. Indigenous

styles of worship, ecclesiastical programs emphasizing education and social development of race with advocacy for racial justice and equality help bind congregants together as a people as well as a religious community (Paris, 1985:109-110). Black church congregants also refer to each other as “brother” and “sister” and think of themselves as family. Mormons think of themselves as family, but in cohesive wards, they also care for each other as family.

### Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to illustrate how the symbolic system of family, and an ethic of care, aids in establishing cohesive LDS congregations known as *ward families*. Yet, like any other form of family, some family members either feel left out, or are in some cases actively shunned. In the case of ward families, those I interviewed mentioned five different areas of exclusion: singlehood, childlessness, racism, gender issues, and sexual orientation.

I have argued that despite possible divisive properties inherent within a focus of family (such as the various forms of family outside the heteronormative model), active Mormons—those who currently self-identify as Mormon (or LDS) and who attend church regularly-- tend to be able to successfully derive meaning from that focus which aids them in developing an ethic of care towards others. Further, those that stay as well as those who leave may be adding to the cohesiveness of the ward. This type of argument is in line with arguments about strict churches. Strict church theory holds that strict churches are strong churches because less committed members are screened out stimulating higher participation rates among remaining adhering members (Iannaccone 1994:1180). Especially for Mormons, their high levels of participation may increase overall religiosity. Higher participation rates among remaining adhering members combined with identity markers, such as codes of conduct which includes an ethic of care, may further enhance both religiosity and satisfaction with Church and community.

The social integration of the LDS ideology is concentrated on the family. Although family can mean many things to all people, for welcoming wards such as the Salt Lake ward, their congregation becomes “like family.” The ability to feel like family stems in part from feeling that the group radically welcomes them into their presence and accepts and loves them, warts and all. They also feel that they can depend on their *ward families* for care like they would be able to depend on their immediate and extended family members. In this sense, Smith’s idea of a human family can be compared to a *ward family* which is a smaller kinship unit of the greater human family kinship network.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

### Hymn # 152: God Be With You Till We Meet Again<sup>344</sup>

*I ask the middle-aged man sitting across from me to tell me about his experiences with LDS wards. “I found a home. I am the only member of my family that is LDS, but I have found that there is a ward family as well. And yes, everyone calls each other brother and sister, but it gets down to where it actually is brother and sister, in more terms than just addressing them as such. It is more the heart felt feelings for them. The ward here, like I said, it’s a family. And, every ward I’ve been in that really cares about the individual, it’s a family”.*<sup>345</sup>

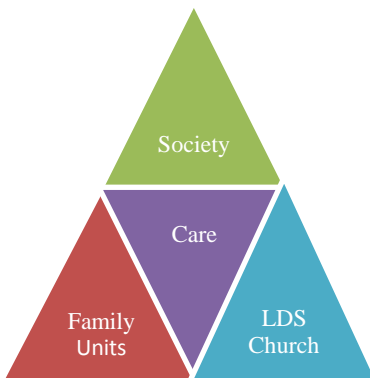
In this final chapter I summarize how the symbolic system of family as a whole may be what enables Mormons to think of their congregations as their *ward family*. As stated in the introduction, Mormons often refer to their congregations (wards) as their *ward family*. The goal of this dissertation has been to explore the social structure of family and the possible connection the moniker *ward family* has with the Church’s formal focus on family, and to consider what the social construction of family within the LDS Church may mean for congregational cohesiveness.

In order to illustrate how the idea of family is constructed and applied by Mormons I introduced my Model for the Symbolic System of Family. This model is a combined set of four structuring elements as shown below, and each of these elements has been discussed in the previous chapters. As mentioned in chapter one, the focus of the four structuring elements included themes that were echoed throughout the entire work. This interlocking connection disclosed the way that an ethic of care is constructed “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little” (2Nephi 28:30). The theme of care, as presented in chapter seven, is the crucial central element which ties all the pieces together into one larger idea of family, Church, and society (or community).

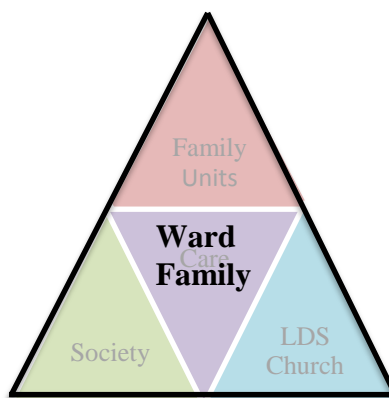
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<sup>344</sup> This hymn is often sung at the end of Sacrament meeting and is a favorite for funerals.

<sup>345</sup> Personal interview conducted August 23, 2012.



Model for the Symbolic System of Family



Ward Family

The model of the *Symbolic System of Family* illustrates how meaning is constructed in one component and threads of that piece are carried over into the other pieces, all of which are woven around a central theme of care. Caring for family and others in actual family units, within Church callings, and as part of a society, Mormons often see themselves as members of the larger “human family” in which all are literally brothers and sisters. Mormons who do refer to their fellow congregants as their *ward family* tend to resonate with Robert Frost’s idea of home being a place where when you go there, people take you in—you are unquestioningly welcomed and accepted.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Frost & Lathem, 1969.

Mormons believe that people are the literal spirit-children of God, and that everyone is a member of a greater human family. Reflecting this idea, Mormons refer to each other as “Brother” and “Sister.” One rather eloquent man told me “I think ultimately the gospel tries to teach us that you and I are brothers and sisters, that we are a family. While in our everyday exchanges we refer to each other as brother and sister, when we get to the other side we will realize we will have a deeper understanding. I will know that you are *Sister* Black, my Sister!”<sup>347</sup> A lively elderly woman told me “I truly believe that every person, every single person, is my brother and sister. It is easy to have empathy if you are my sister--you’re just a sister I hadn’t met before!”<sup>348</sup>

In reference to the ward as family, a young recent BYU graduate told me that the first week he and his wife arrived in the Salt Lake ward they felt “welcomed into their family.”<sup>349</sup> He explained to me that “we refer to our ward as the ward family because that’s what they are. In the eternal sense, because we are all children of our heavenly father, we are literally brothers and sisters. But, in another sense, the ward does act as a large community family. I know that if we are in trouble, we can turn to the ward – as that larger community family unit. We can depend on them to be there for us like family would.”<sup>350</sup>

Like many other religious traditions, the metaphor of family extends to the ministry of the church. One woman in her early twenties explained how she viewed her ward’s bishop. “The bishop is the paternal leader of the ward, and everyone else in the ward watches over each other. It is a ward family. We share things together, celebrations, mourning, playing, lots of ways we

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<sup>347</sup> Personal interview conducted September 17, 2012.

<sup>348</sup> Personal interview conducted August 23, 2012.

<sup>349</sup> Personal interview conducted March 24, 2013.

<sup>350</sup> Personal interview conducted March 24, 2013

increase the bond.”<sup>351</sup> This interview quote aligns with sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox’s findings of a distinctive family-related norm and ideology within religious institutions. Wilcox observed that, for Mormons, this ideology aids in the integration into the life of their religious communities. Wilcox stated that:

Religious institutions that are strongly committed to a specific family-related ideology or norm and enjoy substantial religious vitality can exert an especially large measure of social influence on their members to reinforce the benefits of adherence to their family culture, and when necessary can apply formal sanctions to foster normative conformity among active religious adherents who do not necessarily accept the ideology or norm (2004:103-04).

This large measure of social influence is part of the social context that the re-contextualized idea of family is structured by and which it also structures. Fostering normative conformity through social pressures integrates perceptions and actions into a norm. Once the norm has been established it is used to reinforce the family-related ideology and is no longer questioned, but accepted as a truth statement.

The Wilcox quote also reflects strict church theory which defines strict churches as those that demand high participation rates and have strict codes of conduct (Iannaccone, 1994). Demand for participation and conduct is executed through social pressure to conform. Although some level of pressure to conform is present in all groups, Mormons may feel that the pressure to conform is especially acute due to the efforts of the “correlation” movement. The result of Church efforts as well as social pressure are rather uniform codes of conduct, for the Mormons in the Salt Lake ward, a code of conduct they embody is an ethic of care.

An ethic of care is at the core of my argument. This dissertation has argued that an ethic of care is grounded within the LDS ideology of family and contributes to congregational cohesiveness. This work has illustrated how some Mormons have extended the idea of family

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<sup>351</sup> Personal interview conducted March 24, 2013.



beyond the limited heteronormative model the Church uses as its focus, to a much more capacious idea of family that was actually first presented by Joseph Smith (Mormonism's founder) in his theory of "human family" (Smith, 1978 vol. 3:387). Yet for others, the ghost of the nuclear family is all too real. For Mormon congregations who embody an ethic of care and the theory of human family, ward becomes a kind of extended family or kinship network – a *ward family*.

#### Ward: A Family of Families

*"We know, in fact, that social phenomena are born not in the individual but in the group"* (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]:233).

Mormons think of themselves as family, and in cohesive wards, they also care for each other as family. Serving God by serving others and the idea that Church was part of daily life were comments and themes that I heard often. During the interviews the most consistently mentioned theme was how Mormonism is a way of life, and that the life of a Mormon is the life of a Christian. Historian Matthew Bowman stated that Mormonism is "a way of life and a system of ethical behavior rather than a theological argument" (2012: 229). Bowman went on to say that in place of emphasizing the theological and the particulars of belief (especially since those are rather vaguely defined), the focus of Mormonism is "whether a member is in the pews every week, holds a calling, and can be relied on if a bishop is looking for somebody to drive an elderly widow to the hospital" (229). I heard some version of the phrase "doing service for others is just what we do" as I interviewed both life-long and newly converted Mormons.<sup>352</sup> For the Mormons I met and interviewed, their religion is a way of live, a lived and embodied religion. To be a Mormon is to have an ethic of care and service in addition to a distinctive belief system. Of course Mormons are not the only group that "live" their religion; it would also be a mistake to

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<sup>352</sup> Personal interview conducted August 28, 2012.

assume that they are the only religious tradition that serves God by serving others. What may be unique, however, is that the LDS way of life, this system of ethical behavior oriented toward care for others is a unique entextualization of family within the social context of congregation. This entextualization of family and care becomes a *habitus*, a way of being in the world, and a way of being Mormon.

### The Mormon Ethic of Care

This project has illustrated the ways in which an ethic of care enables Mormon religious communities to consider fellow congregants as a *ward family*, which in turn, promotes cohesiveness in these religious communities. An ethic of care is codified through Church callings and enables Mormons to think of others as if they were part of an extended kinship network.

As I have noted in chapter four, Durkheim's 1912 work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* described how kinship bonds are relationships of reciprocal obligations of help, vengeance, and so forth (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]:100). These bonds are most often blood relations but also include voluntarily formed relationships through reciprocal cooperation (Sahlins, 2013:62). This arrangement of mutually beneficial cooperation among a collective is often called social capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:119). Social capital refers to the social assets a person has the ability to acquire by virtue of his or her relationship with and within a social group. Social capital benefits the whole, as well as the individual and is facilitated by trust and participation within the group (Putnam, 2000:288). For Mormons, the examples of social capital that I observed were the ability of the group to respond to a neighborhood disaster such as flood or fire, or picking up litter in a local park. Another example is how several congregants helped new members learn English, or study for their driver's test. As mentioned in the previous chapter, when you ask Mormons why they are so willing to help others, often their answer is "it

is just what we do.” In other words, service is part of their LDS lifestyle, an institutionally constructed disposition--their *habitus* (Bourdieu, 2003).

Germinal thinker Pierre Bourdieu employed the Aristotelian term *habitus* to point to the set of dispositions that govern the supporting actions of social capital (2003:123). Bourdieu and Wacquant describe *habitus* as a structuring mechanism which allows a collective to create practical dispositions which can be applied to abstract problems (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:221-22). An interesting characteristic of *habitus* is that it becomes a taken-for-granted aspect of being, and in fact becomes a forgotten mutually constructed arrangement of power. It becomes so much a part of the lifestyle of a particular group that it is assumed to be an inherent characteristic of the group. For example, at the core of the Mormon idea of family is the LDS *habitus* of gender. Within Mormonism the *habitus* of a gendered family provides the basis for the power structure of the LDS Church. Gender has been deemed as a divinely given state rather than recognized as a social construction; family has been defined as consisting of the gendered positions of male father and female mother; gendered roles have been assigned to family members—men are priesthood holders and women are mothers; male priesthood holders become Church leaders. Yet, along with gendered roles within the family, there is also the implied duty to care for one another. This duty to care develops into a set of dispositions as an ethic of care which is applied to the abstract problems of religious duty, salvific temple ritual, and creating a “good society.”<sup>353</sup> Given that family is at the root of Mormonism, and therefore the foundation of LDS religious thought and action, it becomes the necessary tool in building the structuring mechanism of LDS *habitus*

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<sup>353</sup> I am using the term “good society” here as I did in chapter five when referring to home and visiting teaching, and the act of taking care of one another. As Bellah et.al has pointed out, “the good society” is difficult to define but could be said to be a quest for the common good (1991:9).

In chapter seven I discussed how factors of LDS callings, rituals of care, belief, and the interactions of belonging to a congregation help form an ethic of care. I offered the figure below as a representation of the interconnectedness of these elements, and the way that the currents between them flow both ways.

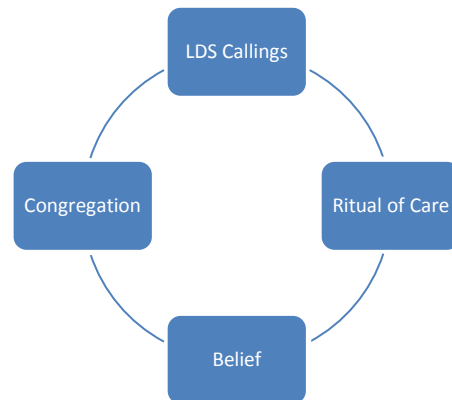


Figure 9.1 Ethic of care

I found that the Church’s focus on family may provide a working template for an *ideal* of family, but it does not accurately represent the experience of family within LDS wards. The reality of family is a much more capacious and flexible idea than can be contained in the Church’s current emphasis on nuclear family as reflected in “The Proclamation.” A more robust idea of family is firmly rooted in the LDS doctrine of eternal families and in the temple rituals that bind large kinship networks of families and their ancestors together in the afterlife. This capacious idea of family was first developed in LDS ideology by Joseph Smith’s initial teachings of a “human family,” and the notion that all of humankind is the literal spirit-children of a father and mother in heaven. The observable presence of many forms of family within LDS communities reinforces the theory that our “nostalgic” notion of nuclear family units with clearly

defined gender roles of breadwinner father, homemaker mother, and biological offspring is not the lived model of a modern family unit.

This work has illuminated how ward families are similar to actual families in two important ways; LDS wards/congregations are assigned rather than chosen, and members of both (congregation and family) choose which members to acknowledge and fully accept. In both cases some members are excluded and/or actively shunned and evicted. In the case of the Salt Lake *ward family* their ability to be profoundly inclusive and accepting (e.g. loving members before they know them) may contribute to congregation cohesiveness. This ability for radical inclusion reflects Smith's initial "human family" ideology and demonstrates the fact that a much more robust idea of family is at work within LDS congregations than the extremely limited version of heteronormative nuclear family units endorsed by the Church. This study then has shown that when the Church's narrow definition of family is expanded and made flexible that it can be applied and used as the term *ward family*.

It is when the narrow model of family is expanded beyond the single nuclear family unit and into the larger community that care becomes an LDS *habitus*. By using the term *habitus* I am pointing to both a prescription and a predisposition to care for others. A prescription, as Mormons have a duty to care for others through Church callings, and a predisposition as caring for others becomes second nature. When a *habitus* of care becomes a way of being Mormon emotive bonds develop and result in cohesive wards.

Thriving and cohesive LDS wards exhibit care for others outside of their ward and service to the community (extending beyond its LDS members) as part of their Mormon lifestyle. It is an ethic of care that helps congregations build strong church and strong societies. My

research concludes that developing an ethic of care is the crucial element in cohesive religious communities, and not a focus on family.

### Summary of Chapter Discussions

In the first two chapters I presented my argument and introduced myself as an insider/outsider who is using participant observation methodology. In chapters three through six I presented glimpses into the Mormon history, culture, and bureaucratic structures of the Church which illustrated how participation and conduct within the Church has been codified. By considering the LDS Church's history, the ways that Mormons live and think about family, and the way the Church establishes a code of conduct through temple ritual, doctrine, and callings, those chapters established a reference for the ideology and lived reality of family within the LDS Church.

Chapter three presented a discussion on LDS history and how its past is steeped in themes of family and care. I illustrated how Joseph Smith's personal relationship with his family and the idea of a human family laid the foundation for Church doctrine and temple ritual that sealed families together eternally. Persecution of the early Mormons combined with the quest to establish "Zion" created a tightly-knit community of believers who depended on each other for spiritual and temporal care. Even though the structure of family has changed since the LDS Church was established, from polygamy, to nuclear family units, to today's post-modern structure of blended families, the idea of family as the central unit of both Church and society has remained.

Chapter four presented general ideas about family and society. I suggested that LDS ideas of family and kinship are closely related to those of conservative sociologists. Therefore, the chapter presented discussions from those sociologists as a way of illuminating Mormon thought.

Since my questions asked about families, it is not surprising that people told me how family was the most important thing to them. As I discussed in chapter five, LDS culture is a culture steeped in home and temple ritual focused on family. Most of the Mormons I interviewed mentioned that learning to care for their family helped them learn to care for others, especially their fellow congregants. This caring for each other through ward callings such as home and visiting teaching helped them practice an ethic of care.

Chapter five illustrated that through bureaucratic systems of service such as Church callings, congregants learn to practice care for each other as dictated by norms of duty and obligation inherent within those callings. Through such repetitive practices, care and service become a code of conduct and thus part of the Mormon individual and group identity. While the initial idea of care may reflect or mirror an ideal that is assumed to be actively present in a nuclear family units, the presence of such family units within congregations is neither necessary or sufficient for congregants to practice care and service towards others. The crucial element is the willingness to perform acts of service for others.

Chapter six presented a discussion of how actual family and kinship networks include bonds of obligation and duty to help each other and that for Mormons, those bonds and networks are not bound by the temporal world but extend into the eternities. I have illustrated how the Mormon culture is a marriage culture and that part of leading a religious life is being married. An idealized vision of family is a tool employed by LDS doctrine such as “The Proclamation” (CJCLDS, 1995) and individual Mormons. An example of this is the nostalgic version of a nuclear family. Therefore, in that chapter I also discussed the “nostalgia trap” (Coontz, 2000 [1992]) of believing that the 1950s idealized model of a nuclear family is today’s reality. While

Mormons may agree that this idealized notion of family is nearly impossible to achieve; one man bristled at the term “nostalgic” and told me that falling short of an ideal is better than not having the ideal for which to aim. He told me that he felt that sometimes people need ideals as tools to help them do the hard work of being parents and spouses.<sup>354</sup> For Mormons, being parents and spouses is the foundation of family; in Mormonism it may also be the foundation of congregation both literally and metaphorically.

Chapter seven provided a look at the mechanics that fuel an ethic of care. There I offered a discussion on how Mormons think about and care in terms of family and community, and how an ethic of care becomes a code of conduct. By participating in codified systems of care such as home and visiting teaching, Mormons are able to practice the ideal of care assumed to be inherent in consanguineous kinship networks and create cohesive bonds with their fellow congregants.

In chapter five I discussed how the correlation movement was established and how family home evening was an important development that came out of those efforts. But I did not discuss how it can be exclusive. Whenever conformity and similitude are stressed there are those who are left out either through voluntary self-exclusion or through untenable pressure that forces them to leave. Therefore, in chapter eight I discussed who is left out and how a focus on family can sometimes be divisive. Despite divisive factors and issues of strict church, Mormons are able to construct an ethic of care which helps bind them together as *ward family*.

### The Significance of This Work

The arguments presented suggest that this may also work for other LDS wards as well as other religious communities. Although this research has offered only a snapshot of a small slice of

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<sup>354</sup> Personal interview conducted June 30, 2012.



Mormonism, it may be the case that my findings could be applied universally to Mormonism and perhaps have some implications towards religious congregations in general. I have shown how, in some ways, the LDS Church acts like one very large congregation through Church-wide standardized programs established through the correlation movement; the Church-wide meetings of General Conference, and standardized Church handbooks. Centralized Church literature (lesson manuals, Church magazines, scriptures) and programs help establish a comparatively uniform ideology which is generally accepted by all Mormons. One should not assume however that all Mormons accept LDS ideology in the same way or on the same level.

This study has provided important insights into the lived experience of LDS religious communities, and adds to the fields of Mormon studies, family and religion studies, lived religion, and congregational and ritual studies. It has provided a critical study of particular aspects of Mormons ideology and considered the lived reality of LDS culture. As relatively few people outside of the LDS church write about Mormons and Mormonism, gaps are left in the scholarship. As an insider/outsider I have been able to bridge that gap and provide a more robust understanding of Mormonism.

There may be gaps in Mormon family studies that this study may help address. While there are some studies that consider a general Christian approach to family, society, and caring for the poor such as theologian Lisa Sowle Cahill's 2000 work *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*, this dissertation may be the first to consider a uniquely LDS approach. Therefore another gap that this project will help fill is that between the family itself and the interface between the LDS religion and family, and family and community. While this project can in no way fill all of the gaps where the study of the LDS Church is absent in congregational and ritual studies, it may aid in bringing Mormonism into the greater conversations.

Given that this study has provided insights into the ways that robust ideas of family help create cohesive congregations, this work may be a building block for more work on how we think about both strong societies and strong families. This work then may be an important new way to consider the place of family in society.

### Future Work

The LDS Church, like any other global church, is affected by global changes. One of the great strengths of the Church is the ideology of continued revelation which allows the Church to change and respond to social pressures. Just as the Church was able, through the instrument of revelation, to change its policy on black men and the priesthood, it may be the case that social pressure and globalization will force other changes such as the ordination of women (i.e. extending the priesthood to women). Watching that process unfold and studying the resulting outcome, either the ordination of women or the re-entrenchment of strict gender roles, will be the work for future social scientists, and this dissertation hopefully provides a starting place.

This study also could serve as a jumping off point for Mormon theologians to begin a systematic constructive theology of LDS family ideology. All of the pieces necessary to redefine family within the LDS Church are already in place and are being applied within the tradition. LDS theology already deems all members spiritual descendants from the common ancestor of an embodied god and his goddess wife, and salvific temple ritual, first for one's own ancestors, helps establish extended kinship networks. Codified systems of care in the form of Church callings allows for the practice of Christ-like love for others. Perhaps most crucial is the fact that Smith initially laid the ground work with his idea of "human family." It is now up to the theologians to consider a re-thinking of their systematic theology and establish a more capacious definition of family.

Naturally there is much more work to be done in the area of Mormon Studies. It is my hope that social scientists and religious scholars will continue to question gender, kinship, family, culture, ethics, and community studies within Mormon studies. Hopefully this work will encourage more “outsiders” to consider this robust religious tradition and its people.

#### Insider/Outsider: The Effect of This Study on the Researcher

*“There is both promise and danger in peering into the religion of your childhood that you have since left behind” (Orsi, 2005:158)*

Returning to explore the religion of my childhood, and the one I left behind in my late twenties is a decision I have never regretted. The ability to consider the tradition as a social scientist gave me the opportunity to see the Church and its believers with new eyes. I came to admire the radical commitment to a peculiar lifestyle, and at times envy the surety of Mormons’ faith, and their belief in their God. I also came to envy their close-knit communities.

Sociologist James Spickard states that doing ethnography means that the researcher allows him or herself not just a chance to look at others, but the chance to live with them, to truly encounter them. “An encounter with others always changes us. We compare our way of seeing with theirs, as they compare theirs with ours; the normal human result of such conversations is that both sides grow” (Spickard, 2002:243). During the time I spent among the Mormons, I met people who inspired me with their caring acts towards others as they showed me what true Christian love for others can do for a community. I look up to those in the Salt Lake ward specifically as role models, and above all I thank them for their courage to share their lives with me.

My personal experiences while working with the Mormon groups have included some radical acts of kindness and care, such as a New Jersey Bishop giving me the keys to his large

van so I could move a desk and a dresser, and a relief society sister in Utah noticing my desperate financial situation and bringing me over a box of food. But there are also instances of feeling outside the circle of both community and care. My father died while I was working with the Utah group, and although he was LDS he was inactive and requested that no funeral services be held. Therefore, I found myself without a religious community to mourn with and found that I longed for someone to pray with, and someone to organize a funeral luncheon featuring the Mormon comfort food “funeral potatoes.”<sup>355</sup>

In the end, spending so much time with Mormons did not, much to the disappointment of some, convince me that my previous decision to officially leave the church was a grave error—I am not racing to the baptismal font in order to be re-baptized. I have always felt that if I could not fully support a faith tradition, it would be heretical for me to belong, so I continue to choose to stand more firmly on the “outsider” border of the insider/outsider paradigm.

The lyrics “prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love, from the American folk hymn, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* (Robinson, 2010) ring true to my personal relationship with religion in general and Mormonism specifically. As part of my “deep hanging out” I sang with the ward choir and the local All Christian Choir (although the majority of the choir are Mormon). Every time I sang those words “prone to wander, lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love” they resonated deep within my soul. So although I grew up a Utah Mormon girl, and parts of my *habitus* will always be Mormon, I continue to wander. On the days

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<sup>355</sup> Funeral potatoes are a baked potato dish and staple of Utah Mormon funeral luncheons and other ward dinners although I found them in New Jersey as well. I felt I had “arrived” and been accepted into the NJ LDS ward when I was given the recipe for this baked potato dish and asked to bring it to a ward Christmas dinner. University of Utah fellow Kate Holbrook is looking at Mormon food culture (including funeral potatoes and green Jell-O) in her forthcoming dissertation “Radical Food: Mormon Foodways and the American Mainstream” (forthcoming). The recipe for this calorie-laden comfort food is provided in the appendix.

in which I long for community, that breaks my heart; but most days, it is what urges my heart, and my work, forward.

### Ward Family

Mormons are often referred to as a “peculiar people.” Their codes of conduct, and their religious practices, including their temple rituals for the dead, are not always understood by outsiders.

Mormons have a unique and notorious history filled with persecution, polygamy, and pioneers, and their theology places them in an unclear relationship with the rest of Christianity. Mormons belong to a strict church, a religious tradition with high commitment and high costs, yet the LDS Church has survived and grown. This dissertation has shown how part of why these “peculiar people” thrive in cohesive congregations is the development and a practice of an ethic of care.

To be a Mormon means to serve and care for others. Within an ethic of care is the ability to extend an idea of family and kin to all of humanity—to imagine a human family. In cohesive LDS wards, to be Mormon means to think of all people as “brother” and “sister,” to take up the Christian edict to love thy neighbor, to truly be a *ward family*, even if at times that ideal is beyond the lived reality.

## Appendix A

**THE FAMILY  
A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD**

THE FIRST PRESIDENCY AND COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES OF THE CHURCH  
OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

WE, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim 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.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

IN THE PREMORTAL REALM, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

WE DECLARE the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God’s eternal plan.

HUSBAND AND WIFE have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. “Children are an heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

THE FAMILY is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to

provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

WE WARN that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

WE CALL UPON responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

This proclamation was read by President Gordon B. Hinckley as part of his message at the General Relief Society Meeting held September 23, 1995, in Salt Lake City, Utah.

## Appendix B

## Hymns

**#300 Families Can Be Together Forever**

1. I have a family here on earth.  
 They are so good to me.  
 I want to share my life with them through all eternity.

## Chorus:

Families can be together forever  
 Through Henv'nly Father's plan.  
 I always want to be with my own family,  
 And the Lord has shown me how I can.  
 The Lord has shown me how I can.

2. While I am in my early years,  
 I'll prepare most carefully,  
 So I can marry in God's temple  
 For eternity.

Text: Ruth M. Gardner, 1927-1999 © 1980 IRI.

Music: Manja Y. Watkins, b. 1938. © 1980 IRI

**#252: Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel**

1. The world has need of willing men who wear the worker's seal.  
 Come, help the good work move along; put your shoulder to the wheel.

## Chorus:

Put your shoulder to the wheel; push along  
 Do your duty with a heart full of song,  
 We all have work; let no one shirk.  
 Put your shoulder to the wheel.

2. The Church has need of helping hands, and heart that know and feel.  
 The work to do is here for you; put your shoulder to the wheel.

3. Then don't stand idly looking on; the fight with sin is real.  
 It will be long but must go on; put your shoulder to the wheel.

4. Then work and watch and fight and pray with all your might and zeal.  
 Push every worthy work along; put your shoulder to the wheel.

Text and music: Will L. Thompson, 1847-1909



**#30: Come, Come Ye Saints**

1. Come, come, ye Saints, no toil nor labor fear;  
But with joy wend your way.  
Though hard to you this journey may appear,  
Grace shall be as your day.  
'Tis better far for us to strive our useless cares from us to drive;  
Do this, and joy your hearts will swell  
All is well! All is well!
  
2. Why should we mourn or think our lot is hard?  
Tis not so; all is right.  
Why should we think to earn a great reward  
If we now shun the fight?  
Gird up your loins; fresh courage take.  
Our God will never us forsake;  
And soon we'll have this tale to tell  
All is well! All is well!
  
3. We'll find the place which God for us prepared,  
Far away in the West,  
Where non shall come to hurt or make afraid;  
There the Saints will be blessed.  
We'll make the air with music ring, shout praises to our God and Kind;  
Above the rest these words we'll tell  
All is well! All is well!
  
4. And should we die before our journey's through,  
Happy day! All is well!  
We then are free from toil and sorrow too;  
With the just we shall dwell!  
But if our lives are spared again to see the Saints their rest obtain;  
Oh, how we'll make this chorus swell  
All is well! All is well!

Text: William W. Clayton, 1814-1879    Music: English folk song

**#298 Home Can Be a Heaven on Earth**

1. Home can be a heav'n on earth when we are filled with love,  
Bringing happiness and joy, rich blessings from above.  
Warmth and kindness, charity, safety and security  
Making home a part of heaven, where we want to be.
  
2. Drawing family near each week, we'll keep love burning bright.  
Serving Him with cheerful hearts, we'll grow in truth and light.  
Parents teach and lead the way, children honor and obey,  
Reaching for our home in heaven, where we want to stay.

3. Praying daily in our home, we'll feel His love divine;  
 Searching scriptures faithfully, we'll nourish heart and mind.  
 Singing hymns of thanks, we'll say, "Father, help us find the way  
 Leading to our home in heaven, where we long to stay."

Text: Carolyn Hamilton Klopfer, b. 1936 © 1985 IRI

Music: W. Herbert Klopfer, b. 1936 © 1985 IRI

### **#249 Called to Serve**

1. Called to serve Him, heavn'ly King of glory,  
 chosen e'er to witness for his name,  
 Far and wide we tell the Father's story,  
 Far and wide his love proclaim.

Chorus:

Onward, ever onward,  
 As we glory in his name;  
 Onward, ever onward,  
 As we glory in his name;  
 Forward, pressing forward, as a triumph song we sing.  
 God our strength will be;  
 Press forward ever,  
 Called to serve our King.

2. Called to know the richness of his blessing  
 Sons and daughters, children of a King  
 Glad of heart, his holy name confessing,  
 Praises unto him we bring.

Text: Grace Gordon, alt.

Music: Adam Geibel, 1855-1933

### **#250 We Are All Enlisted**

1. We are all enlisted till the conflict is o'er;  
 Happy are we! Happy are we!  
 Soldiers in the army, there's a bright crown in store;  
 We shall win and wear it by and by.  
 Hast to the battle, quick to the field;  
 Truth is our helmet, buckler, and shield.  
 Stand by our colors; proudly they wave!  
 We are joyfully, joyfully marching to our home.

Chorus:

We are all enlisted till the conflict is o'er;  
 Happy are we! Happy are we!  
 Soldiers in the army, there's a bright crown in store;

We shall win and wear it by and by.

2. Hark the sound of battle sounding loudly and clear;  
Come join the ranks! Come join the ranks!  
We are waiting now for soldiers; who'll volunteer?  
Rally round the standard of the cross.  
Hark! 'tis our Captain calls you today;  
Lose not a moment, make no delay!  
Fight for our Savior; come, come away!  
We are joyfully, joyfully marching to our home.

3. Fighting for a kingdom, and the world is our foe;  
Happy are we! Happy are we!  
Glad to join the army, we will sing as we go;  
We shall gain the vict'ry by and by.  
Dangers may gather—why should we fear?  
Jesus, our Leader, ever is near.  
He will protect us, comfort, and cheer.  
We are joyfully, joyfully marching to our home.

Text: Anon., *The New Golden Chain*, New York 1866  
Music: William B. Bradbury, 1816-1868

#### #224 I Have Work Enough to Do

1. I have work enough to do, ere the sun goes down.  
For myself and kindred too, ere the sun goes down:  
Ev'ry idle whisper stilling with a purpose firm and willing,  
All my daily tasks fulfilling, ere the sun goes down.

2. I must speak the loving word, ere the sun goes down.  
I must let my voice be heard, ere the sun goes down:  
Ev'ry cry of pity heeding, for the injured interceding,  
To the light the lost ones leading, ere the sun goes down.

3. As I journey on my way, ere the sun goes down,  
God's command I must obey, ere the sun goes down.  
There are sins that need confessing; there are wrong that need redressing  
If I would obtain the blessing, ere the sun goes down.

Text: Josephine Pollard, 1834-1892  
Music: William J. Kirkpatrick, 1838-1921

#### #308 Love One Another

1. As I have loved you, love one another.  
This new commandment: love one another.  
By this shall men know Ye are my disciples,

If ye have love one to another.

Text and music: Luacine Clark Fox, 1914-202, arr. © 1961

**#152 God Be with You Till We Meet Again**

1. God be with you till we meet again;  
By his counsels guide, uphold you;  
With his sheep securely fold you.  
God be with your till we meet again.

Chorus:

Till we meet, till we meet,  
Till we meet at Jesus' feet,  
Till we meet, till we meet,  
God be with you till we meet again.

2. God be with you till we meet again;  
When life's perils thick confound you;  
Put his arms unfailing round you.  
God be with you till we meet again.

3. God be with you till we meet again;  
Keep love's banner floating o'er you;  
Smite death's threat'ning wave before you  
God be with you till we meet again.

Text: Jeremiah E. Rankin, 1828-1904

Music: William G. Tomer, 1833-1896

Appendix C

General Authorities

**GENERAL AUTHORITIES OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS**

October 2022

**The First Presidency**





**The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles**

  
Dallin H. Oaks

  
Richard L. Evans

  
Robert D. Hales

  
James E. Faust

  
Jeffrey R. Holland

  
Neil L. Andersen

  
Brent L. Wilentz

  
Robert C. Oaks


  
Robert D. Anderson

  
Robert D. Matthews

  
Robert D. Anderson

  
Robert D. Anderson

**The Presidency of the Seventy**







**The First Quorum of the Seventy**



**The Second Quorum of the Seventy**



**The Presiding Bishopric**





## Appendix D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about the LDS ward you are now attending.
2. How do you think Mormon congregations/wards are different than other types of religious groups?
3. What are the ways that you and your family participate in the ward?
4. Tell me about your experiences of attending other LDS wards.
5. The LDS Church has a big emphasis on service – can you tell me about a time when you have served others?
6. Can you tell me about a time when others have served you?
7. Tell me about your experiences with Home and Visiting teaching.
8. One of the LDS Church's goals is to strengthen families – what does that mean to you?
9. Does the church accomplish that goal and if so how or why not?
10. How are Mormon families different than non-Mormon families?
11. Have you been a member of or attended other churches (religious traditions)?
12. What is the biggest difference, to you on a personal level, between Mormons and other religious groups?
13. Think about Mormonism in general, what would you most like people outside of your religious community to know about you and your family life as a member of this community?<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> I found that the wording of this last question was problematic and my interviewees did not always understand what I was asking. Therefore I often re-worded it, asking them to tell me what they wanted someone outside of Mormonism to know about them and their religion.

## Appendix E: Funeral Potatoes

The recipe below was given to me at a Relief Society meeting.

### **Mormon Funeral Potatoes**

#### Ingredients:

1 Large bag of frozen shredded hash brown potatoes (do not cook)

2 cans of cream of chicken soup

1 pint of sour cream

1 small bunch of green onions (just the green part cut really fine, I just use scissors!)

GOBS of grated cheese, I use cheddar/jack combination but any is fine. (what is a GOB? Oh about 2 large handfuls, but more is good too.)

#### Instructions:

Mix all ingredients in a large bowl, plop in a 9x13 pan and cook at 350 degrees for about ½ hour.

Optional: Top with crushed Corn Flakes, Crushed Potato Chips, or Bread Crumbs w/melted butter etc., be creative!

## Appendix C: The Word of Wisdom

## Doctrine and Covenants Section 89

Revelation given through (sic) Joseph Smith the Prophet, at Kirtland, Ohio, February 27, 1833. As a consequence of the early brethren using tobacco in their meetings, the Prophet was led to ponder upon the matter; consequently, he inquired of the Lord concerning it. This revelation, known as the Word of Wisdom, was the result.

*1–9, The use of wine, strong drinks, tobacco, and hot drinks is proscribed; 10–17, Herbs, fruits, flesh, and grain are ordained for the use of man and of animals; 18–21, Obedience to gospel law, including the Word of Wisdom, brings temporal and spiritual blessings.*

1 A WORD OF WISDOM, for the benefit of the council of high priests, assembled in Kirtland, and the church, and also the saints in Zion—

2 To be sent greeting; not by commandment or constraint, but by revelation and the word of wisdom, showing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days—

3 Given for a principle with promise, adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints, who are or can be called saints.

4 Behold, verily, thus saith the Lord unto you: In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom by revelation—

5 That inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good, neither meet in the sight of your Father, only in assembling yourselves together to offer up your sacraments before him.

6 And, behold, this should be wine, yea, pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make.

7 And, again, strong drinks are not for the belly, but for the washing of your bodies.

8 And again, tobacco is not for the body, neither for the belly, and is not good for man, but is an herb for bruises and all sick cattle, to be used with judgment and skill.

9 And again, hot drinks are not for the body or belly.

10 And again, verily I say unto you, all wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of man—

11 Every herb in the season thereof, and every fruit in the season thereof; all these to be used with prudence and thanksgiving.

12 Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I, the Lord, have ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving; nevertheless they are to be used sparingly;

13 And it is pleasing unto me that they should not be used, only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine.



14 All grain is ordained for the use of man and of beasts, to be the staff of life, not only for man but for the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven, and all wild animals that run or creep on the earth;

15 And these hath God made for the use of man only in times of famine and excess of hunger.

16 All grain is good for the food of man; as also the fruit of the vine; that which yieldeth fruit, whether in the ground or above the ground—

17 Nevertheless, wheat for man, and corn for the ox, and oats for the horse, and rye for the fowls and for swine, and for all beasts of the field, and barley for all useful animals, and for mild drinks, as also other grain.

18 And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones;

19 And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;

20 And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.

21 And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them. Amen.

## Glossary

**Aaronic Priesthood:** The first (or lesser) level of priesthood given to worthy male Mormons who are at least twelve years of age. Aaronic priesthood holders have the authority to bless and administer the sacrament (Eucharist). The second level of priesthood is the Melchizedek priesthood.

**Apostle:** A “Quorum of Twelve Apostles” are church general authorities comprising the second tier of church organization. Traditionally, when the current church president/prophet dies, his successor and the successor’s two councilors are called from this group of men.

**Baptism for the dead:** One of the rituals (Mormons refer to as “ordinances”) performed in LDS temples. These are proxy baptisms performed on behalf of deceased persons. Mormons consider baptism as an essential ordinance for salvation. Therefore, in order to provide an opportunity for salvation to all persons throughout history these proxy baptisms are performed with the belief that the deceased will have the opportunity to accept or reject this baptism in their life after death. Mormons feel they are personally responsible for insuring that all of their ancestors be given such an opportunity, hence the extreme interest in genealogy.

**Bishop:** The local authority presiding over a ward. The office of Bishop is held exclusively by men who are members in good standing (see “members in good standing” entry). Bishops, or members of the Bishopric conduct worship services, but do not preach. They provide general leadership and management for the congregation; duties include overseeing all staffing, care of facilities, coordination of local missionary work, and member counseling. Bishops are called by Stake leadership, and report to the Stake president.

**Bishop’s Storehouse:** Part of the Church’s welfare system, the Bishop’s Storehouse is a local distribution center that functions much like a small grocery store distributing food to the needy. Storehouses are stocked with essential household goods and food (but no pet food or pet supplies), much of which is generated from Church owned and operated production and agricultural facilities (such as church farms, canneries, and bakeries). Most often those using the storehouse are LDS, but access to any of the Church’s welfare programs is not restricted to Mormons. To gain access to the storehouse approval must be obtained from the local Bishop. In return for goods received, recipients are required to render service to the church in some way (e.g. clean the Church building, work in the Church’s cannery or bakery, work in the storehouse, etc.). Aid is considered as an emergency stopgap and not to be depended on indefinitely.

**Bishopric:** Group of three men consisting of the Bishop, his First Councilor and his Second Councilor. Although not officially part of the Bishopric, the ward clerk is often referred to as “being in the Bishopric” by members in the ward.

**Book of Mormon:** A book of LDS scripture that Mormons hold was translated by Joseph Smith from a set of gold plates which he retrieved from a hillside in 1827. This book contains the history and teaching of two groups of ancient Israelites who immigrated to the New World around the time of the Tower of Babel and 600 B.C.E. Devout Mormons assert that this book is “true” and the divine word of God given to their prophet Joseph Smith.

The following is a description of *The Book of Mormon* from the LDS website LDS.org:

In or about the year A.D. 421, Moroni, the last of the Nephite prophet-historians, sealed the sacred record and hid it up unto the Lord, to be brought forth in the latter days, as predicted by the voice of God through his ancient prophets. In A.D. 1823, this same Moroni, then a resurrected personage, visited the Prophet Joseph Smith and subsequently delivered the engraved plates to him (<http://lds.org/scriptures/bofm/explanation?lang=eng>).

And another description of *The Book of Mormon* from the LDS website Mormon.org:

The Book of Mormon is the word of God, like the Bible. It is Holy Scripture, with form and content similar to that of the Bible. Both books contain God's guidance as revealed to prophets as well as religious histories of different civilizations. While the Bible is written by and about the people in the land of Israel and surrounding areas, and takes place from the creation of the world until shortly after the death of Jesus Christ, the Book of Mormon contains the history and God's dealings with the people who lived in the Americas between approximately 600 BC and 400 AD. The prophets in the Book of Mormon recorded God's dealings with His people, which were compiled by a prophet named Mormon onto gold plates.

Before these faithful Christians perished, their record was safely hidden away. Joseph Smith obtained these ancient records in 1827 and with the gift and power of God, Joseph was able to translate the ancient writings into what we have today. The Book of Mormon, along with the Bible, testifies that Jesus Christ is our divine Redeemer and that by living according to His gospel we can find peace in this life and eternal happiness in the life to come (<http://mormon.org/book-of-mormon/>)

**Calling:** Positions within the church are referred to as callings as Mormons believe one is *called* by God, through a local authority (Bishop or priesthood leader), to fill a church position. Every position in the church (i.e. every calling), from Sunday school teacher to the prophet/president, is handled in this way. All callings are volunteer and all church positions except the top leadership positions of prophet/president, apostles, are unpaid.

All callings, except the president, the apostles, and patriarchs, (which are all lifetime positions once called) are temporary positions lasting anywhere from one to five years. After serving in a position the person is “released” from that calling and returns to the pool of congregants and is eligible to be called for a new position. There is not an hierarchal progression of positions—for instance one does not progress from Nursery Worker, to Sunday School Teacher, to Bishop, to Stake President, to apostle, etc. For instance a Bishop is just as likely to be called to fill a position as a Nursery Worker as he is to fill a position as a Stake President upon his release as Bishop.

It is common for a person to fill a wide variety of positions throughout their lifetime and most Bishops attempt to give as many of their congregants positions as possible. Some Bishops have even been known to invent callings (e.g. blood drive coordinator, nursery snack coordinator, etc.) in order to engage as many congregants as possible.

While social status and levels of education have no impact on the type of position one can expect to be called to, gender does impact callings greatly. Women are never called to serve in Bishopric, Stake leadership, or Church leadership positions with the exception of Young

Women's President and Relief Society President in all levels (local, stake, and church). Even those few women's leadership positions are not independent—all positions fall under a male/priesthood authority. For example, Relief Society presidents report to their Bishop who approves and oversees their budget.

**Deacon:** The first (or lowest) office in the Aaronic priesthood. Duties of a deacon include passing (or administering) the sacrament. Standard age for ordination into the priesthood as a deacon is 12. All priesthood positions are limited to males.

**Doctrine & Covenants:** A collection of “divine revelations and inspired declarations given for the establishment and regulation of the kingdom of God on earth in the last days” (taken from the “Explanatory Introduction”). Most revelations contained in this book were received by Joseph Smith, but also includes revelations received by other church leaders. The revelations recorded here were received between 1831 and 1918. In reference and common language, this book is often referred to as the D&C; it is treated as any other scriptural authority.

**Endowment:** Mormons will often refer to “taking out their endowments” at the temple. They are pointing to the temple ritual/ordinance – *endowment* which includes a ritual of making promises, or covenants, with the promise of gifts given by God in return. The ritual includes teachings about the purpose of life (including lessons on the Garden of Eden), the Atonement of Jesus Christ, LDS gospel principles (restoration of the Gospel, its ancient powers and present life compliance with Gospel requirements) and instructions about the plan of salvation. Taking out one's endowments is the first temple ordinance (ritual) which must be completed before other ordinances such as temple marriage or family sealings can take place. After having received one's own endowments, the living are then expected to act as proxies in performing temple ordinances on behalf of their deceased ancestors (Hamilton & Cutrubus, 1993:100)

**Fast and Testimony Meeting:** The first Sunday of each month is “Fast Sunday” where members are expected to fast for two meals and donate the money they saved on food to the needy in their area as “fast offerings.” In rural areas, on fast Sunday the deacons of the ward go door to door to their fellow congregants to collect those offerings. In other areas members are expected to give their Bishop their fast offerings along with their monthly tithing donation.

The sacrament services of this Sunday are opened up to the congregation allowing anyone who wishes to publically share their testimony of the Church (see “Testimony”). Mormons believe that it is their duty to develop their own personal testimony and then share it with others. They believe that a testimony grows stronger by sharing it often in these meetings as well as with friends and family members in any setting at any time.

**Fireside:** A meeting held outside regular services, usually held in the church or sometimes a home which usually features an inspirational or educational speaker.

**Garments:** Sacred undergarments that are first received and worn when Mormons go through the temple rites known as “temple endowments” (see “Endowment”). It is to be an outward expression and sign of a commitment to Christ. Once received, these sacred garments are to be worn at all times as a reminder of particular covenants made in the temple. Among members there is some debate about whether garments are to be worn under other undergarments, such as

bras for women, and if they should or should not be worn during sex. On the other hand, Mormons generally agree that it is permissible to swim and participate in other sports without wearing their garments.

Mormons are taught that the wearing of garments protects them from harm, temptation, and evil. It is not unusual to hear folktales of Mormons who have been in terrible fires and have only suffered burns on the parts of the body not covered by their garments.

Garments can only be purchased through LDS owned distribution centers (now also available on-line), and proof of LDS membership and possessing a temple recommend is necessary in order to purchase them. The cut and style of garments have changed over the years. Initially they covered nearly the entire body leaving only the hands, feet, neck, and head exposed. Now garments are cut above the knee and have short sleeves which still dictates rather modest clothing. Altering the garments to accommodate different styles of clothing (even a wedding dress) is strictly forbidden.

**General Authorities:** Positions whose jurisdiction is Church-wide. These are priesthood callings and include members of the First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve (aka Twelve apostles), the First and Second Quorums of Seventy, presiding Bishopric (not the same as local Bishopric), and Church patriarchs. General Authority positions are full-time positions; wages, or stipends, for these positions are paid from Church funds such as tithing.

**General Conference:** Established in 1830, “conference” is a bi-annual meeting of all LDS Church members worldwide held the first weekends in April and October. Meetings are conducted by LDS leaders and are a series of two hour sessions given over the course of two days designed to instruct and inspire members. Meetings are held in the conference center in Salt Lake City, Utah which holds 21,000 people. Members and interested non-Members wishing to attend the event in SLC must obtain a ticket from their local Bishop. However, as the meetings are broadcast via satellite to Church meetinghouses throughout the world (on some television stations, radio, and the internet) meetings are open to the general public. Additionally, the official LDS website contains archives of past conference addresses (<http://lds.org/general-conference?lang=eng>). The highlight of the conference is the address from the Church President. The LDS Church president is seen as the current prophet for the church. Therefore, as Mormons believe in continued revelation, the address from the Prophet is seen as direct communication from God.

**Gentile:** A somewhat dismissive term used to designate non-Mormons. This term was used extensively in early Mormonism and while still recognized, is not as widely used in current rhetoric.

**Golden plates:** Many thin plates of gold, each about the size of a sheet of paper, bound together in a volume similar to a book containing the history of two ancient groups of people who immigrated to the New World between the time of the Tower of Babel and 600 B.C.E. The plates were buried in a hillside near Palmyra New York, which Mormons believe Joseph Smith was led to by the angel Moroni (which is why a statue of Moroni stands atop most LDS temples). This history was recorded in an ancient Egyptian language which Smith translated with the aid of seer stones which he called the Urim and Thummim (found buried with the plates) into the *Book of Mormon*. When the *Book of Mormon* was published many referred to it as the Golden Bible.

The Mormons never officially referred to it as such, but perhaps inadvertently encouraged it with their advertising containing gold letters printed on black paper. The narrative surrounding Smith's finding and translating the golden plates is a cornerstone of the founding of the church as well as a building individual identity as a Mormon.

**Home Teacher:** A set of two male priesthood holders (referred to as companions) who are assigned to families within their ward which they are to visit at least once a month in order to teach, build relationships of trust, and provide assistance in both spiritual and temporal matters. It is hoped that the families can call upon their Home Teachers in times of need. Monthly visits ideally include a short lesson (as directed by the Church), prayers, and an informal visit. These positions are assignments rather than callings. It is common for young deacons to be assigned as their father's home teaching companion. This helps the young men learn to be home teachers themselves as well as provides them with service opportunities. No equally similar position is available for young women.

**Investigator:** A person who is actively interested in the LDS Church as a potential convert. Investigators usually visit with LDS missionaries on a weekly basis. Visits include lessons called "missionary discussions" which teach basic Mormon doctrine.

**Jack Mormons:** These are adults who were raised in Mormon families and were baptized as children but are currently non-practicing/non-believers. While Jack Mormons no longer believe in the LDS doctrine, they have never officially left the religion. Though no longer officially connected to the church, they may still be mired in the religion through cultural and/or familial ties, have family members that are still practicing Mormons, and commonly live in areas like Utah County that are predominately Mormon. These types of familial ties generally means that family gatherings and events such as weddings, baby blessings, funerals, etc. usually have a distinctly Mormon tone which they cater to in order to maintain family ties and relationships.

**Law of Chastity:** A code of conduct forbidding any sexual relations before marriage, and requiring complete fidelity to husband or wife during marriage. Living a chaste and virtuous life is part of the BYU Honor code which all students must comply with or risk disciplinary action which may include expulsion.

**Melchizedek Priesthood:** A level of priesthood which is higher than the Aaronic priesthood and bestowed on worthy LDS males who have already received the Aaronic priesthood and the office of priest. This level of priesthood was withheld from Black Mormon men until 1978, and, as with all levels of priesthood within the LDS church, is withheld from all Mormon women. LDS men must hold the Melchizedek priesthood in order to participate in temple rituals including marriage and being eternally sealed to their family. Those who hold the Melchizedek priesthood have the authority to administer to the sick, give priesthood blessings to family members and others, can bless and administer the sacrament, and can ordain others to the offices in the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods.

**Members in good standing:** To be able to be considered as a member in good standing Mormons must keep the commandments, pay a full tithe, attend church meetings regularly, and observe the Word of Wisdom and the Law of Chastity. Often it also means having had an

interview with the local Bishop where he has appraised and approved of your worthiness and counseled you on anything that may be amiss in your life.

**Nephi:** Mormons believe this is an ancient prophet and historian who came from Israel with his family to the New World somewhere around 590 B.C.E. The record of Nephi comprises a large part of the *Book of Mormon*. Decedents of Nephi are referred to as Nephites. In Utah the small town of Nephi is named for this *Book of Mormon* character.

**Nuclear family:** This project uses the term “nuclear family” to mean a set of parents and their biological, or adopted offspring. The terms “nuclear family” and “traditional family” are interchangeable, however the term “traditional family” puts emphasis on a heterosexual couple and their biological offspring whereas “nuclear family” can be extended to mean any set of parents (same sex or heterosexual) and their children (biological or adopted).

**Patriarch:** Usually an older, very devout Mormon male who is ordained to give patriarchal blessings. This is the only LDS calling that comes directly from the prophet, and as such is held in high regard and treated with great respect. It is also one of the few callings that is a lifelong position.

**Patriarchal Blessings:** Patriarchal blessings are given to Mormons by an LDS patriarch. They traditionally include blessings of comfort and protection as well as instructions specific to the individual. They also include statements concerning the person's lineage in the house of Israel. These blessing are only given once in a lifetime and are seen to be personal counsel and revelation from God concerning the person's destiny and what they are called to do within this life on earth.

**Pearl of Great Price:** A collection of extracts of translations of the Bible “as revealed to Joseph Smith” (Pearl of Great Price: Moses). Most of the work is sections from the book of Moses. It also contains “The Book of Abraham” “as translated from the papyrus, by Joseph Smith,” “Joseph Smith – Matthew” and excerpts from “Joseph Smith – History.”

**Priest:** An office of the Aaronic priesthood held by males who are at least sixteen years old. Priests have the authority to baptize in addition to having the Aaronic priesthood's authority to bless and administer the sacrament.

**Polygamy:** The practice of polygyny by early Mormons. Technically the term polygamy refers to the practice of taking more than one spouse of either sex, not necessarily the practice of polygyny (marrying more than one wife) which was practiced by the early Mormons. Although not practiced for the past one hundred and twenty-two years, Mormonism is still often equated with polygamy. This form of plural marriage was officially practiced by some (most estimate less than half) Mormons between the years of 1843 and 1890. On September 24, 1890 LDS church president Wilford Woodruff and other church officials issued a manifesto declaring that Latter-day Saints are to “refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by law of the land” (CES, 2003:440-441) effectively ending church sanctioned polygamy. On October 4, 1890 the manifesto was officially presented for formal acceptance by the church at the Church's general conference as stipulated by the United States Secretary of the Interior for public and formal

acceptance by the church so that Mormons would no longer be charged for being disloyal to the United States, could become U.S. citizens, and before Utah could be considered for statehood. Groups that practice polygamy today are most often offshoots of Mormonism such as the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (led by Warren Jeffs) or underground groups that never accepted the revelation and resulting manifesto ending plural marriage. Modern mainstream Mormons found to be practicing polygamy are subject to excommunication from the LDS Church. In December, 2013, a federal judge ruled that parts of the Utah polygamy law were unconstitutional. While bigamy (being legally married to more than one person) is still against the law, the practice of religious cohabitation (living together as a plural family) is permissible.

**Priesthood:** A station or office in the LDS church, which all male members aged 12 and over who have been deemed worthy of the position, are eligible to hold. “Having,” or “holding” the priesthood means that the man has been authorized to act in the name of, and with the authority of, God. There are two levels of priesthood, Melchizedek and Aaronic with positions in each level such as deacon, teacher, priest or high priest. Members of the priesthood are charged with blessing and passing the sacrament (Eucharist) during Sunday Sacrament meetings. For men exclusion from the priesthood equates to exclusion from the temple and its ordinances which include eternal marriage and family sealings. For women, priesthood exclusion equates to be prohibited from fully participating in the Church’s lay leadership.

**Quorum of the Twelve (Twelve Apostles):** Patterned after the twelve apostles in the New Testament, this is a group of twelve men described by the church as being called as special witnesses of Christ. This group is part of the upper structure Church authority and governance second in authority only to the First Presidency. The apostles also colloquially referred to as Church “general authorities.” These men are held in high regard and seen as prophets of God and Christ. They represent the Church in many ways including speaking at General Conference and writing articles for LDS publications. The sermons and articles these men generate are assigned as topics that members are asked to speak on during Sacrament meeting. See Sacrament meeting.

**Quorum of the Seventy:** According to the LDS website, LDS.org, there are currently eight Quorums of the Seventy. Each of these quorums may have up to seventy members and are referred to as “Seventies” or “the Seventies.” Members of the First Quorum of the Seventy are called to serve until the age of seventy after which they are given emeritus status. Members of the Second Quorum of the Seventy usually only serve for three to five years. Only the first and second quorums serve the general Church, the others serve locally and are called Area Seventies.

**Relief Society:** A women’s auxiliary to which all LDS women belong is centered on service and charity. It was founded in 1842 by Joseph Smith and the first Relief Society President was his wife Emma. Relief Society is one of three meetings held within the three hour block of LDS Sunday meetings (the other two are sacrament meeting and Sunday school which both men and women attend together). Women are to attend Relief Society and men attend Priesthood meeting. In addition to the Sunday meeting there is an evening meeting once a month with special activities and lessons and usually a pot luck dinner. In conjunction with the meetings, Relief Society members minister to each other through monthly visits in which women, in groups of two, visit other LDS women to provide them with a special lesson and minister to any



needs they may have. For instance, it is common practice for the Relief Society to arrange for dinners to be brought to a fellow “sister” and her family when she has a baby. Other services are also provided by the Relief Society such as helping arrange food for a funeral service, arranging play dates with moms and children, having missionaries over for dinner, or providing food for larger missionary meetings, help in cleaning ward members’ home or apartment when they move into or out of the ward, etc.

**Sacrament:** Equivalent to the Lord’s Supper or Eucharist. Mormons do not practice the ritual of transubstantiation; the ritual of Sacrament is one of remembering Christ and renewing baptismal covenants. The Sacrament consists of bread and water which is blessed by a designated prayer (see D&C 20:77-79) and passed (or administered) passed separately in metal trays to the congregants during the weekly Sunday Sacrament Meeting. After the bread (or water) is blessed, deacons (and other priesthood holders) carry a tray to the end of a pew and hold it while the congregant helps him or herself to a piece of bread (or small cup of water). The congregant at the end of the pew takes the tray from the deacon and passes it to the congregant next to him or her. If children are old enough, they can help themselves to the bread and water; if they are too small the parent will hand (or feed) the items to the child. In this fashion, the sacrament is actually passed by the members themselves, and no one is excluded from handling the sacrament trays. No one is expressly invited or prohibited from partaking of the sacrament, it is expected that such things are between the individual and the Bishop, or the individual and God.

**Sacrament meeting:** The main worship service and one of three meetings in the standard three hour time block of Mormon Sunday meetings. During Sacrament meeting the Sacrament is blessed and passed to congregants after which members who have been previously asked to speak, give “talks” on assigned topics. There are usually three or four speakers often consisting of a youth speaker (under age of 18), adult members, and a visiting church leader such as a Stake president. There are usually three or four hymns sung by the seated congregation. or sometimes the ward or children’s choir will sing. There is no sermon given by the bishop. Sacrament meetings are open to the general public. See Talks.

**Sealings:** A ritual (“ordinance”) performed in LDS temples. Most often associated with temple marriage, but can also include children, this ritual “seals” people together for all time and eternity. Children that are born to a couple who has been sealed in the temple are automatically sealed to the parents.

The LDS temple ritual of “sealing” or temple marriage is considered essential for salvation. A temple marriage “seals” the couple together for eternity, and also “seals” their future children to them. Children born to a couple who have had a temple marriage are considered to be “born under the covenant.” If a couple has children before their temple marriage (which happens often, especially in the case of converts) their existing children (whether natural or adopted) can be sealed to their parents as part of the temple marriage ceremony. Likewise, when proxy temple marriages are performed for deceased ancestors, the ceremony also includes proxy sealings of the children to their parents. Couples who have had a temple marriage and later adopt children must have their children sealed to them.

**Seminary:** Seminary is a four year religious educational program for youth (open to both LDS and non-members) between the ages of fourteen to eighteen. Seminary classes are held each

weekday during the school year and students earn a graduation certificate for completing all four years. The four topics for study (one each year) include: *Old Testament*, *New Testament*, *Book of Mormon*, and *Doctrine and Covenants* and/or Church History.

The seminary program was launched in 1912 in Salt Lake City, Utah with seventy students and has since spread to 140 countries with current enrollment around 370,000. Most students meet before or after school, but in Utah where the LDS population is dense, students have seminary class as part of their regular school hours. It should be noted however that even though seminary is taught during regular school hours in Utah, students are actually “excused” from school for that hour and meet in a building adjacent to their regular high school in a building owned by the LDS church. After high school, students at Brigham Young University (BYU) and Utah Valley University (UVU) continue seminary classes which are a required part of every BYU student’s curriculum. Since many UVU students hope to eventually be admitted to BYU, many take seminary classes at UVU which will transfer as part of their academic credits to BYU.

**Scripture:** Mormon scripture includes four books: The King James Version of the *Holy Bible*, *The Book of Mormon*, *The Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*. This group of scriptures is often called “standard works.” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints publishes all four of these books bound together and includes topical guides, a biblical dictionary, maps, and an index. Mormon slang refers to this rather bulky set of scripture as a “quad” (indicating four books) or “sticks” (a reference to original writings being done on scrolls which were wrapped around sticks). Mormons are very serious about personal bible study, yet the Church does not encourage independent bible study groups. That being said, it is uncommon to see a devout Mormon at church without this set of scriptures in either book or electronic form. To obtain a free copy of the *Book of Mormon* visit <http://mormon.org/beliefs/book-of-mormon>. To obtain copies of the other books visit any LDS bookstore or order on-line from <http://deseretbook.com/>.

**Stake:** A group of five to ten wards (congregations). Although wards contains anywhere between two and eight hundred members, a stake generally contains around three to five thousand members.

**Statics:** Currently there are 2,922 stakes worldwide. Within the United States there are a total of 1,478 stakes. For a quick comparison: there are 555 stakes in Utah, and 5 stakes in New Jersey. For more statics see <http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/statistics/>

**Talks:** Speeches given from the pulpit, regardless of whether the speaker is a very small child or the church president, are often referred to as “talks.” Mormon Clergy (ward Bishops or other local leaders) do not give sermons from the pulpit each Sunday as in most Christian churches; rather, members of the ward are invited to speak, or give a “talk” in each Sunday’s sacrament meeting. Sunday speakers vary depending on the ward. Usually the speakers are one or two adult speakers, a youth speaker, or sometimes missionaries, or a representative from the local Stake leadership. In recent years however, the official LDS church website, [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org), has started referring to all conference “talks” as “sermons.” This subtle change in language, using a term that is more widely recognized by most Christians, may point to the church’s efforts of becoming more mainstream and more broadly accessible.

**Temple:** Mormons attend the temple to conduct sacred rituals such as marriage and baptism for the dead. No weekly worship services are held within the temple. Only members with a temple recommend may enter the temple, yet temple recommend holders may enter any of the LDS temples around the world. A recommend is obtained by being a member in good standing and through an interview process wherein the local Bishop evaluates worthiness. Evaluation of worthiness includes regular church attendance, paying a full tithe (10% of income), and of course, keeping the commandments and living the LDS codes of conduct. Currently there are 134 LDS temples in operation around the world, 10 under construction, and 16 more planned. There are 77 temples in the United States, 15 of which are in Utah. Of the 15 Utah temples, 10 are in the Wasatch Front which is the area between Brigham City and Salt Lake City (80% of Utah's population resides in this area). Temples serve an area called a "Temple district" which contains anywhere between 3 and 105 stakes. The average number of stakes in a Utah Temple District is 40.

**Temple marriage:** While the LDS church recognizes civil marriages, it holds that temple marriage is the only form of marriage sanctioned by God and the only form that insures couples will be together in the after-life and throughout eternity. Temple marriage is also seen as part of God's plan of salvation. See also Sealing.

**Testimony:** A personal conviction of the "truth" of the LDS gospel. Mormons believe that it is their sacred duty to obtain, develop, and share their own testimony which is a spiritual witness given by the Holy Ghost (the third member of the Godhead). Elements of this witness include "knowledge" that Heavenly Father lives and loves His children, that Christ lives and is the Son of God, that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God called to restore His church, and that the LDS church is led by a living prophet today. Testimonies always contain the phrase "I know that the Church is true." If the person speaking cannot make such a claim they are said to still be developing their testimony.

**Traditional family:** Within the confines of this project, the terms "nuclear family" and "traditional family" are interchangeable. The term "traditional family" however, puts emphasis on a heterosexual couple and their biological offspring whereas "nuclear family" can be extended to mean any set of parents (same sex or heterosexual) and their children (biological or adopted).

**Ward:** Indicates a standard church unit which is organized geographically and presided over by a Bishop; it is roughly equal to a congregation. Unlike other religious traditions where members choose which church, parish etc. to attend, Mormons are assigned to a local ward near their home.

The name, and practice, of geographical division is based on political wards or voting districts. In addition to geographic boundaries, the size of the congregation a ward contains is determined by the number of members in that given area. Wards contain a minimum of two hundred members and a maximum of eight hundred. When wards grow beyond eight hundred members they are split into smaller wards. When groups are smaller than two hundred, they are called a branch.

Typically up to three wards will use one church building. This means that in areas where many Mormons live you will find many Church buildings, and vice-versa. For example, in

Morristown NJ there is only one LDS church building which houses one ward and one branch. Mormons who live up to twenty-five miles away from Morristown are in the Morristown ward and must travel to attend church. By contrast, in Springville Utah, a small city of less than 30,000 people in roughly 20 square miles there are 26 church buildings serving over seventy wards. If you are curious as to how many Mormons are in any given area, you can simply count the number of LDS church buildings. For more information see [www.mormon.org](http://www.mormon.org) <http://mormon.org/faq/#Church|question=/faq/ward-stake-branch/>

**Word of Wisdom:** A Mormon code of dietary health similar to that of Jews, or Muslims. The LDS Word of Wisdom prohibits the use of tobacco, alcohol, and hot drinks (commonly interpreted to mean coffee and tea). The code also states that fruits and herbs should be used in their season; that the flesh of beasts and fowl used sparingly, or only in times of winter, cold, or famine; that wheat is for man, corn for ox, oats for the horse, and rye for the fowls and swine. However, Mormons only require strict adherence to the use of tobacco, alcohol and coffee and seem to leave decisions about how strictly to follow the other elements up to the individual.

Mormons hold that Joseph Smith received this health code in a revelation in 1833; it is recorded as section 89 of the *Doctrine and Covenants*. Adhering to the Word of Wisdom is a prerequisite for baptism, temple attendance, holding of certain Church offices, and employment within the Church and its affiliates including BYU. It is also part of the BYU Honor code which all students must comply with or risk disciplinary action, up to and including expulsion.

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