

afflicted. An individual may desire the intimate communication with deity engendered by a prayerful fast when preparing for a difficult task or significant change in the circumstances of life. A person may fast when seeking spiritual enlightenment or guidance in decision making, strength to overcome weakness or endure trial, comfort in sorrow, or help at other times of special need.

General principles of the fast include prayerful preparation concerning the subject of the fast and frequent contemplation and meditation throughout to achieve oneness in purpose and spirit with the Lord; a quiet, humble, and cheerful conduct befitting one seeking blessing or spiritual enlightenment (Matt. 6:16–18; cf. 3 Ne. 13:16–18); and a prayer of gratitude and thanksgiving when ending the fast.

Rich blessings are promised to those who fast and help the needy (Isa. 58:8–9). Self-control, communion with the Lord, and spiritual strength and power accompany compliance with the law. The spirit of the fast is aptly represented in latter-day scripture: “Verily, this is fasting and prayer, or in other words, rejoicing and prayer” (D&C 59:14).

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## FAST OFFERINGS

The first Sunday of each month is designated as a Fast Sunday, and Latter-day Saints are asked to fast for twenty-four hours and donate at least the value of the meals not eaten as fast offerings. Fast offerings are cash or in-kind donations given to the BISHOP to help the needy following a short period of fasting.

The concept of fast offerings appears as early as the time of Isaiah, who encouraged people to fast and “deal thy bread to the hungry” and to “bring the poor that are cast out to thy house” when fasting (Isa. 58:7). Fasting was also practiced in the postapostolic Church, in which several early Christian fathers advised that “to help the poor with the food saved, fasting is a good work” (Kittel, Vol. 4, p. 934). By the mid-second century some

churches held twice-weekly voluntary fasts, and leaders collected funds for the poor following weekly worship services (Swenson, pp. 373–78).

The Prophet Joseph SMITH, instituted the practice of collecting fast offerings for the poor in KIRTLAND, OHIO (*JD* 12:115), where Church members had begun gathering in the early 1830s. Later, on May 17, 1845, in Nauvoo, Illinois, the QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES sent a general letter to the Church defining “the principles of fasts,” stating:

Let this be an example to all saints, and there will never be any lack of bread: When the poor are starving, let those who have, fast one day and give what they otherwise would have eaten to the bishops for the poor, and everyone will abound for a long time; and this is one great and important principle of fasts approved of the Lord. And so long as the saints will all live to this principle with glad hearts and cheerful countenances they will always have an abundance [*HC* 7:413].

During the exodus from Nauvoo the pioneers seldom observed a common fast day but often were asked to give to the poor. It appears that the giving of regular fast day donations was reinstated in the Salt Lake Valley during the drought of 1855–1856. Of that period George A. Smith wrote:

In all these times of scarcity . . . measures were taken to supply those who were unable to furnish themselves. A fast day was proclaimed for the church on the first Thursday of each month, and the food saved in that way distributed among the poor; and thousands of persons, who had abundance of bread put their families on rations, in order to save the same for those who could not otherwise obtain it [*CHC* 4:109–110].

Since that time, the observation of a monthly fast of two meals on the first Sunday of each month and the donation of fast offerings have become regular practices in the Church. In the pioneer economy most donations—both tithing and fast offerings—were of food or livestock, and members took donations to the local tithing office or BISHOP’S STOREHOUSE. The goods were then distributed to the needy. Today, fast offerings usually consist of cash. Aaronic Priesthood DEACONS often serve as agents of the bishop in collecting fast donations.

WARDS and STAKES are encouraged to be self-reliant in caring for their poor. Bishops are instructed to seek out those in need and to provide them with life’s essentials. Surplus fast offering funds in stakes are forwarded to Church headquar-

ters, where they are redistributed to areas of greatest need.

Special fasts are occasionally proclaimed by the FIRST PRESIDENCY when urgent needs arise. Such was the case on May 15, 1845, when “enough was contributed to supply the wants of the poor until harvest” (*HC* 7:411). In 1985, Church members observed two special fast days and donated \$10,465,000 to hunger relief and community development projects in Africa, South America, and elsewhere (*see* HUMANITARIAN SERVICES).

Historically, fast offerings have seldom been sufficient to provide for all the welfare needs of the Church, and shortages have been met from general Church funds. The counsel of Church President Spencer W. KIMBALL remains in effect: “I think that when we are affluent, as many of us are, that we ought to be very, very generous. . . . I think we should . . . give, instead of the amount we saved by our two meals of fasting, perhaps much, much more—ten times more where we are in a position to do it” (*CR* [Apr. 1974], p. 184).

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## FAST AND TESTIMONY MEETING

An LDS fast and testimony meeting is normally held on the first Sunday of each month, where faithful members of the Church are invited to bear a verbal witness of their feelings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The meeting usually follows a fast by the members, usually from at least two consecutive meals and from liquids also. The fast is officially broken by partaking of the SACRAMENT of the Lord’s Supper. In modern scripture, fasting is described as “rejoicing and prayer” (*D&C* 59:14), which implies that it is more than just abstaining from food. That tone of devotion is also the feeling associated with contributing fast offerings, giving the equivalent cost of the meals, or more, to be used for the poor. The fast and testimony meeting becomes the locus of spiritual sensitivity and contrition, of concentration on the things of God.

A member of the BISHOPRIC or branch presidency conducts the fast and testimony meeting. Usually it begins with an opening hymn and an invocation or prayer, which may be followed by the naming and blessing of newborn children and the confirming of recently baptized members of the Church.

After the sacrament has been administered, the person conducting the meeting expresses his testimony, then invites the members of the congregation of all ages to do likewise. Sometimes they stand in place to speak; at other times they come forward to the pulpit. Each one arises, as prompted by the Spirit, and addresses the congregation extemporaneously. In this setting feelings of profoundest concern are often expressed: appreciation of good family relationships, thanksgiving for the blessings of the gospel, recognition of significant changes in lives, and the fruits of obedience. A faith-promoting experience may be shared or a witness given regarding a point of doctrine or attesting divine inspiration. Such expressions are usually concluded by a prayer or petition in the name of the Lord. The experience is at once enlightening, sobering, and moving. Tears are not uncommon amid acknowledgment of weaknesses and efforts to improve, along with gratitude for divine goodness.

Rarely are such individual expressions longer than five or six minutes. Thus a number of children and adults generally participate in a meeting, which usually lasts a little more than an hour, but may be extended or shortened at the discretion of the presiding officer. In any given year a majority of the membership of the Church, young and old, will have participated in this earnest form of witness on fast Sunday.

One precedent for formal testimony bearing was set at the dedication of the KIRTLAND TEMPLE. On that occasion several stood and, under the outpouring of the Spirit, spoke of things they had seen and felt. In Kirtland it was customary to hold fast meetings on Thursday afternoons. Since 1896 these meetings have usually been held on Sunday.

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## FATE

Fate, as usually interpreted, is the antithesis of self-determination and responsibility. Latter-day Saints reject on scriptural grounds all appeals to