

exhort them to pray vocally and in secret and attend to all family duties, . . . to watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them; and see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither hardness with each other, neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking [D&C 20:42–54].

At one time called “acting teachers” (1909), the name was formally changed to “ward teachers” in 1912. However, for years before that time the effort was informally called “block teaching” because of the geographic way in which families were assigned (Hartley, pp. 375–98). In April 1963, the ward teaching program was expanded and renamed “home teaching,” with emphasis “on the responsibilities of the entire priesthood to ‘watch over the Church’ as commanded in the early revelations—to be concerned with the whole family as a group and as individuals” (*IE* 66 [June 1963]:504).

In a Home Teachers Meeting during general conference in 1966, Marion G. Romney, then an apostle, instructed home teachers to live so that they could always enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost and act under his inspiration in their home teaching responsibilities and to encourage and inspire every family to make and keep the home a truly Latter-day Saint home.

In 1987 Church President Ezra Taft BENSON identified three basic guidelines to be followed by home teachers:

First, Church leaders are to encourage home teachers to know as well as possible the people they are called to teach. Home teachers need to be aware of individual attitudes, interests, and general welfare, working closely with the head of each family to meet the family’s temporal and spiritual needs.

Second, the Church expects home teachers to deliver a short monthly message. When possible, messages are to come from the scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon. Leaders are to instruct home teachers to prepare intellectually and spiritually, giving prayerful consideration to both the temporal and spiritual needs of each family as they prepare lessons. The companionship of the Holy Ghost is essential for successful home teaching, for “if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach” (D&C 42:14). The Church instructs home teachers, therefore, to pray together before each visit, invoking the blessings of the Lord upon the family, and, where possible, to pray with family members at the conclusion of the visit.

Third, home teachers are to magnify their callings (Jacob 1:19) by rendering devoted service. This includes visiting each family early in the month, by appointment, and making additional visits as needed.

Organizationally, home teaching provides a system for effective Churchwide communication. Through stakes, wards, and home teachers, Church leaders have a direct line to every member and have the potential, if necessary, to communicate quickly with the total Church membership, via the local priesthood leaders.

Effective home teaching makes significant contributions to members’ lives. Alert, insightful home teachers find various ways of rendering service, such as providing recognition for achievements; informing families of Church activities; assisting during family emergencies, including illness or death; strengthening and encouraging less active members; and arranging transportation. They serve as resources and share the burden of support that would otherwise be carried by the bishop.

As home teachers are called to work directly with families, they are often in a better position to help these family members than are other Church officers or teachers. As a result, home teaching is one of the most effective ways the Latter-day Saints manifest their commitment to “bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; . . . mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and stand as witnesses of God” (Mosiah 18:8–9).

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HOMOSEXUALITY

God’s teachings about human sexuality are clear, unambiguous, and consistent from Adam to the present. “God created man in his own image . . .

male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27). “And the Gods said: Let us make an help meet for the man, for it is not good that the man should be alone, therefore we will form an help meet for him. . . . Therefore shall a man . . . cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh” (Abr. 5:14–18). “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:11).

When two people of the same sex join in using their bodies for erotic purposes, this conduct is considered homosexual and sinful by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, comparable to sexual relations between any unmarried persons. Masturbation is not condoned but is not considered homosexual.

People who persist in committing acts that violate divine law are subject to Church DISCIPLINARY COUNCILS to help them understand the damage they are doing to their eternal well-being. Particularly offensive is any conduct that harms others, especially those who because of their youth are vulnerable to seduction or coercion. The eternal laws that pertain to CHASTITY before marriage and personal purity within marriage apply to *all* sexual behavior. However, “marriage is not doctrinal therapy for homosexual relations” (Oaks, p. 10). The restored GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST exalts the relationship of husband and wife, as particularly illustrated in the TEMPLE ORDINANCES. From these doctrines, covenants, and ordinances, it is clear that any sexual relationship other than that between a legally wedded heterosexual husband and wife is sinful. The divine mandate of marriage between man and woman puts in perspective why homosexual acts are offensive to God. They repudiate the gift and the Giver of ETERNAL LIFE.

Recognizing that failure to keep the covenants of the gospel of Jesus Christ deprives a person of God’s blessings, the Church offers counseling to help those who are troubled by homosexual thoughts or actions to learn to use their agency to live in accord with divine laws and thereby enjoy the rich blessings a benevolent Father offers to all his children, whatever their temptation or thoughts. “That has been the message of the Jewish and Christian prophets in all ages: repent. Abandon your sins; confess them; forsake them. And become acceptable to God” (Oaks, p. 7).

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HOPE

The concept of hope plays a vital role in Latter-day Saint thought. Firmly centered in Christ and his resurrection, it is the “hope of eternal life” (Titus 1:2) repeatedly alluded to by Paul. It is the opposite of the despair found among those who are “without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). As the Book of Mormon prophet Moroni writes, “If ye have no hope, ye must needs be in despair” (Moro. 10:22). For those, however, who accept Christ’s atonement and resurrection, there comes a “brightness of hope” (2 Ne. 31:20) through which all who believe in God “might with surety hope for a better world” (Ether 12:4).

The scriptures employ the term “hope” in a variety of ways. Some usages suggest desire, such as the statement in Article of Faith 13 that “we believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things.” Others denote firm expectation, such as Paul’s description of Abraham “who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations” (Rom. 4:18). Still others make it an integral part of faith, such as the scriptural observations that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).

Regardless of their form, the individual variations of meaning all center on the confidence or trust in God that springs from knowledge that mankind is saved through the Atonement (“for we are saved by hope,” Rom. 8:15). Hence, hope is inseparably connected with faith. Book of Mormon passages add insight to New Testament teachings by expanding on this interactive relationship: “How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope?” (Moro. 7:40); “hope cometh of faith” (Ether 12:4); “without faith there cannot be any hope” (Moro. 7:42).

In combination with faith, hope leads to knowledge of the truth about Jesus Christ (“if ye