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JAE R. BALLIF

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a fulfilling, lifelong undertaking. It begins with the ordinance of BAPTISM, which represents a COVENANT made between the convert and God. By this act, the convert promises to follow Jesus Christ and keep all his commandments in love and righteousness. God, in return, promises the GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST and the opportunity for ETERNAL LIFE. A newly baptized individual is confirmed a member of the Church by the LAYING ON OF HANDS by a MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD holder, who also blesses the new member with the gift of the Holy Ghost. This is a gift of spiritual discernment to help and sustain members as they attempt to live Christlike lives.

Figuratively, membership means becoming a member of the body of Christ: Each member is an essential part of the whole, just as the foot, the hand, or the eye is an integral part of the body. Each member serves different purposes and has individual gifts, but each is necessary, and if one suffers, "all the members suffer with it"; they are "many members, yet but one body" (1 Cor. 12:20).

The purpose of such membership is to facilitate fulfillment of one's baptismal covenant and to promote personal and spiritual growth unto the "perfecting of the saints, . . . for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). To this end, members participate in many religious activities. These include personal activities (such as prayer, fasting, scripture study, payment of tithing and other offerings; observing wholesome behavioral standards regarding sexual and moral conduct; observing the health principles of the WORD OF WISDOM); family endeavors (such as family prayer and FAMILY

HOME EVENING); congregational and community functions (such as attending Sunday meetings, especially SACRAMENT MEETING, where members may partake of the sacrament); and serving faithfully in various CALLINGS (such as acting as a teacher, a clerk, or a musician). Members are encouraged to participate in various welfare projects designed to provide goods and services to needy people. Activity in the Church is considered both a privilege and a duty of membership.

Another important characteristic of membership is proclaiming the gospel (McKay, p. 479). Members fulfill this responsibility in several ways: by serving full-time missions and financially supporting missionaries; by donating several hours per week proselytizing in their own locale as stake or ward missionaries; and by sharing their religion both by word and way of life as opportunities arise during informal daily interactions with others.

Members are also responsible for gathering the names of their ancestors and performing ordinances in the TEMPLE on behalf of those who did not receive them while alive. Once converts have been members for at least a year and have met certain standards of worthiness, they can enter the temple and receive these ordinances personally and thereafter can receive them as proxies for deceased persons.

Membership in the Church is highly valued by Latter-day Saints. It figures prominently in the self-image of faithful members who willingly consecrate and donate as needed of their time, talents, and blessings from God to the building up of the Church of Jesus Christ on this earth.

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LINDA A. CHARNEY

MEMBERSHIP RECORDS

When the Church was organized in 1830, Joseph SMITH was instructed "that a regular list of all the names of the whole church . . . be kept" (D&C 20:82). This revelation was in harmony with other scriptures (cf. Ex. 28:9–12; Num. 1:2; Phil. 4:3; Mosiah 6:1; 26:36; Alma 5:58). Accordingly, each congregation (WARD and BRANCH) kept records thereafter containing the names of all members in

the congregation and all blessings, baptisms, confirmations, ordinations, marriages, excommunications, and deaths. Through the years, the Church used several successive ways to keep track of membership information prior to the present electronic automated system. Many improvements have been made in the automated records system, and with rapid growth, reaching more than 7 million members by 1990, the Church is studying ways to reduce and simplify the amount of information being kept. Information concerning Church ordinances (baptism, confirmation, priesthood ordination, etc.) is so important that if the record is lost, the ordinances must be performed again.

In the 1800s, the presiding officer of a congregation would give members who were moving a letter to take to the presiding officer in the new congregation who would then enter that information in his own record book of members. In 1906 the Church formalized the procedure for transferring membership records as members moved from one congregation to another by having the presiding officer send a certificate of membership to the new congregation via the office of the Presiding Bishopric, even though at that time no duplicate or “master” record was kept at central Church offices. There were, however, member censuses taken approximately every five years to update records between 1914 and 1950.

In 1941, membership books were replaced by individual membership record cards, and duplicate records were created for each member. One

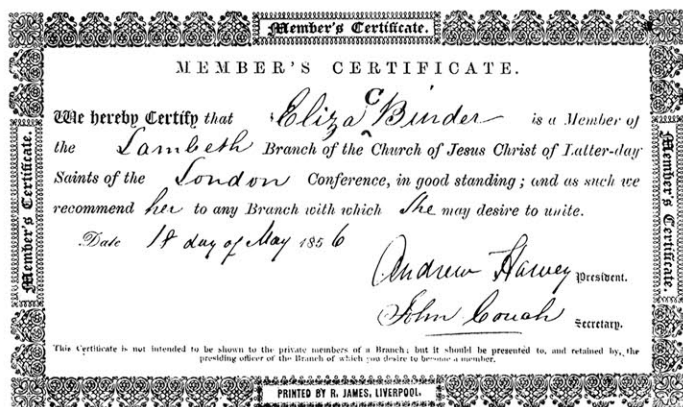
copy was retained by the congregation, and the other was sent to the Church’s master file in Salt Lake City. (Church membership at the time was approximately 890,000.) Each time a baptism, ordination, endowment, or marriage took place, it was recorded on the membership record in the local congregation. All changes were sent to Salt Lake City once a year. When members moved, their membership records were routed through the office of the Presiding Bishopric, and the new address was added to the master record.

The Church conducted a worldwide audit of membership records during 1969 as a forerunner to converting to an automated membership system, which was completed in the United States and Canada in 1975. The Church began decentralization of records that year. The records of all members living outside of the United States and Canada were sent to one of six area offices in which automation began in 1985. All international areas, except Samoa, were using automated systems in 1990. Master records are housed in thirty-five regional offices around the world.

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THOMAS E. BROWN



This membership record from 1856 certifies that Eliza C. Binder, from London, is a member of the Church in good standing. Today membership records preserve vital statistics, including dates of baptism, ordinations, and other ordinances.

MEN, ROLES OF

For men in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the ideal example of manhood is Jesus Christ, the Savior of all mankind. There is no substitute. All men must transcend cultural biases and variations when they decide to pattern themselves after the Son of God, who is the complete representative of the Father. LDS men ideally strive to follow Christ by serving family and fellowbeings through love, work, PRIESTHOOD callings, instruction, and example.

The scriptures and the prophets make it clear to Latter-day Saints what the Savior expects of a man. To the Nephites he plainly stated, “For that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do. . . . Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Ne. 27:21, 27). King Benjamin, tutored by an angel,