A salient characteristic of Church practice is the delegation of specific ecclesiastical responsibilities to every active member of the Church (see LAY PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP). This results in a high level of voluntary member activity, commitment, and sense of community. Only men belong to the priesthood; but both women and men share priesthood blessings, and both hold significant leadership and teaching positions, perform missionary and temple work, and participate prominently in most Church meetings. Other notable Church practices include the encouragement of education, thrift, community service, missionary work, genealogical record keeping, and temple worship.

While the Church is clearly conservative on many issues, its central reliance on continuing revelation provides a divinely guided flexibility, especially in areas of practice. Through the living Prophet, changes are effected as revelation is sought and received. Two main practices discontinued over the years are polygamy, officially ended in 1890 (see PLURAL MARRIAGE; MANIFESTO OF 1890), and gathering to a central geographical location, largely ended in the 1920s (Allen and Leonard, p. 496–97; see IMMIGRATION AND EMIGRATION). At the same time, other practices have been introduced: TITHING, revealed in the 1830s, has been normative since the 1890s; and the complete avoidance of drugs such as tobacco, alcohol, tea, and coffee has been formally required of all active members since the 1920s, nearly a century after first having been revealed (see WORD OF WISDOM). FAMILY HOME EVENINGS, introduced in 1915, were widely instituted as a weekly practice in the mid 1960s. Extension of priesthood authority to all worthy male members, regardless of race, was granted in 1978 (see DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS; OFFICIAL DECLARATION—2). Latter-day Saints expect that further changes will be made by revelation as the needs of the Church unfold.

Mormonism is not a political ideology. The Church’s policy regarding governments allows it to thrive in a wide variety of political contexts around the world. It supports separation of CHURCH AND STATE, respect for duly established law and government, and members’ active participation in civic and charitable affairs (D&C 134; see POLITICS: POLITICAL TEACHINGS). War is generally condemned, but military service is not forbidden. Well before the 1950s, the Church frequently took positions on political issues, especially some affecting Utah. Since that time, Church leaders have increasingly urged members to decide such questions for themselves and have implemented a policy of Church neutrality toward government, except in instances where political developments clearly impinge on important moral issues or severely restrict members’ freedom to practice their religion.

In common speech, the terms “Mormonism” and “Mormon” are not limited to the official teachings or practices of the Church, but often also refer to particular lifestyles, cultural viewpoints, historical events, philosophical outlooks, and artifacts that are characteristic of the broader Latter-day Saint tradition or culture. In most formal settings, however, the Church prefers to avoid the use of these substitute terms wherever possible, to direct attention to the true name of the Church.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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MORMONISM AND WORLD RELIGIONS
See: World Religions and Mormonism

MORMON PIONEER TRAIL
The approximately 1,300-mile-long trail from NAUVOO, Illinois, to Salt Lake City, Utah, was certified by the National Trails Act of 1986 as a National Historic Trail—officially The Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail. Contrary to popular belief, however, the famous trail was not a Mormon creation. The Latter-day Saints did very little trail-blazing. They followed territorial roads and Indian trails across Iowa; various segments of the Oregon Trail from the Missouri River to Fort
Bridger in present western Wyoming; and the year-old trail of the ill-fated California-bound Reed–Donner party from Fort Bridger into the valley of the Great Salt Lake.

Although the trail was not blazed by the Latter-day Saints, and parts of it have at times been known as the Council Bluffs Road, the Omaha Road, the Great Platte River Road, or even the North Branch of the Oregon Trail, the entire route is today almost universally known as "The Mormon Trail" because the Latter-day Saints used it for twenty-three years in such large numbers (at least seventy thousand; no one knows just how many), because of the high drama of their "Exodus," and because they developed separate strands or trails and wove them into their great road (see IMMIGRATION–EMIGRATION).

The trail divides into two unequal sections:

1. The approximately 265-mile-long section from Nauvoo on the Mississippi across Iowa to present-day Council Bluffs on the Missouri. This part of the trail was used relatively little: mainly by Latter-day Saints fleeing Illinois in 1846, by some immigrants "jumping off" from Keokuk, Iowa, in 1853, and in 1856–1857 by seven handcart companies from Iowa City who entered the Mormon Trail at present-day Lewis, Cass County, Iowa. Thousands of other Latter-day Saints crossed Iowa on variants of the 1846 route or on other trails, but all these intersected the trail of 1846 somewhere in western Iowa.

2. The approximately 1,032-mile-long trans-Missouri River segment from present North Omaha (one-time winter quarters) and Florence, Nebraska, across Nebraska and Wyoming, into Utah. This part of the trail was used extensively from 1847 until completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. As in Iowa, variants evolved, but all LDS immigrants used all or parts of this trans-Missouri trail.

While the 1846–1847 trek from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City is by far the best-known part of the twenty-three-year-long Mormon overland migration, it is only part of the story. Between 1848 and 1868, LDS immigrants traveling west from the Missouri River developed or utilized at least a dozen other points of departure and followed many other trails, such as the Oxbow Trail (1849–1864), the Mormon Grove Trail (1855–1856), and the Nebraska City Cutoff (1864–1866). In one way or another, however, all these trails eventually intersected the Mormon Trail. Furthermore, with the
Union Pacific Railroad moving west from Omaha beginning in 1865, during 1867–1868 Latter-day Saints took trains from Omaha to four different railheads (North Platte, Nebraska; Julesburg, Colorado; and Laramie and Benton, Wyoming), from which they eventually picked up the Mormon Trail.

Across the monotonous, undifferentiated, rolling central lowlands of Iowa, the Mormon Trail of 1846 generally followed primitive territorial roads as far as Bloomfield, Davis County, and then vague Pottawattamie Indian and trading trails along ridges from one water source to another, always within fifty miles of the present Missouri state line. Today this part of the Mormon Trail is difficult to follow, not because of the terrain but because modern roads seldom parallel it and because the plow has destroyed most vestiges of it.

West of the Missouri River the Saints passed along river valleys, across grasslands, plains, steppes, deserts, and mountains, and through western forests. Topographically, the trail led across the central lowlands and high plains of eastern and central Nebraska, then the upland trough of western Nebraska and eastern Wyoming, through the Wyoming basin and the middle Rocky Mountains, and into the desert valleys of the Great Basin.

From the Missouri River, Mormon companies followed the broad, flat valleys of the Loupe and Platte rivers for some six hundred miles to present-day Casper, Wyoming, then the Sweetwater River for about ninety-three miles to South Pass, thence
THE VISUAL ARTS

The early history of the Church, especially the uniqueness of its beliefs and practices, influenced the creation of an LDS, or Mormon, image in art. Caricature and cartoon were particularly well suited to the mass market, and Latter-day Saints were a favorite subject. Although some early works conveyed the complexities of the LDS experience, most people developed their image of members of the Church from portrayals that were selective and caricatured. While stereotypical images linger, current depictions of Latter-day Saints, frequently employing works by LDS artists, more accurately reflect the diversity and richness of Mormon life.

By 1860, media depictions had firmly established national stereotypes of Mormonism. During the next decades, negative, stereotyped images of Latter-day Saints appeared regularly in newspapers and magazines such as Harper’s Weekly, Van-