

formal organizational roles and to perform Christian service, such as visiting the sick, caring for the poor, and serving as missionaries. Accordingly, a ward of 400 members may involve as many as 250 of those members in a variety of ward and stake positions. Members view their positions in the Church as “callings.” Those who are in positions of Church authority seek inspiration from God in determining which member should receive a particular calling and then extend the call accordingly. Soon thereafter, the member is sustained by the body of membership that he or she serves, and is then set apart to the position by the presiding authority. Members of the Church expect to serve in a variety of positions throughout their lives. Although some positions are seen to carry greater status—roughly correlated with the ecclesiastical hierarchy—there is no prescribed sequence of Church positions. For example, a man might serve as a stake president and, upon his release, be called as a Sunday School teacher. Members accept such changes as inspired and as new opportunities to serve.

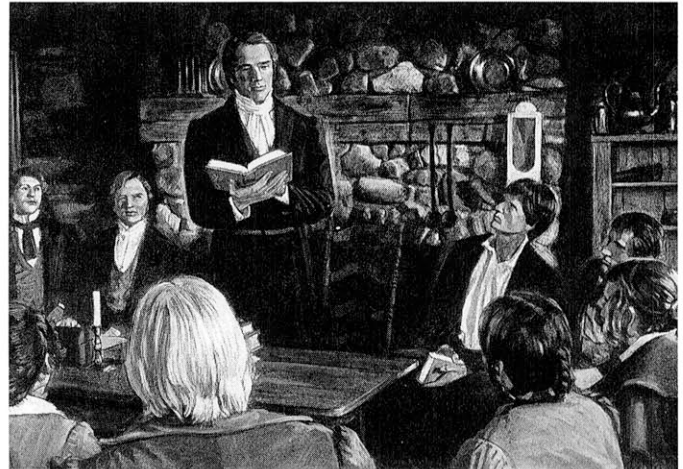
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## ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH, 1830

On Tuesday, April 6, 1830, under the direction of the Prophet Joseph SMITH, a group of friends assembled in Peter Whitmer, Sr.’s log farmhouse to organize the Church, later named The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (*see* NAME OF THE CHURCH). Whitmer, a German immigrant from Pennsylvania, had come to Fayette, New York, in the Seneca Lake region in 1809. Joseph and Emma SMITH and Oliver COWDERY had lived and worked in the Whitmer farmhouse in 1829 while they completed the translation of the Book of Mormon.



*The Organization of the Church—April 6, 1830*, by Robert E. Barrett (1989, 36" × 44"). As instructed by the Lord, Joseph Smith presided over the organization of the Church on April 6, 1830. Six men participated in the organization. About fifty believers and friends were present. Courtesy Robert E. Barrett.

Prior to this date, Joseph Smith and his small but growing group of believers had held meetings regularly in Fayette, Manchester, and Colesville, New York, but April 6 was the day given them by revelation to organize formally as a church, in compliance with laws regulating the creation of new churches in New York State. It appears that the legal requirements were checked and steps taken to comply with New York law prior to the organization. The law required notice on two successive sabbaths, nomination and election of three to nine trustees, and nomination of two members to preside at the election (Carmack, p. 16). These steps assured formal status to the fledgling Church, validating property and ecclesiastical actions in the eyes of the state. Joseph Smith’s official history reports his conclusion that the organizers held the meeting agreeable to the laws of the country (*see* JOSEPH SMITH—HISTORY). There is no record of any challenge to the action, and thereafter the Church conducted both religious rites and business transactions on a regular basis.

The organizational meeting commenced with prayer. The small congregation, made up of about fifty men and women, unanimously voted approval to organize a new church and elected Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum SMITH, Peter Whitmer, Jr., Samuel H. Smith, and David WHITMER as trustees. They also unanimously

elected Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery as teachers and first and second elders of the newly organized Church of Christ. Smith ordained Cowdery as an elder of the Church, and in turn Cowdery ordained Smith, even though they had previously ordained each other to the priesthood office of ELDER (*see* MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD: RESTORATION). The second ordination signified that the two elders were empowered to act in the new Church. They blessed and shared the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper with those present in honor of the special occasion, bestowed the GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST on each individual member present by the LAYING ON OF HANDS, and confirmed each of those previously baptized as members. Smith and Cowdery called and ordained men to different offices of the PRIESTHOOD. Those present at the meeting enjoyed an unusual outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord. After the spiritual feast, they dismissed the formal meeting. Having authority bestowed upon them, the newly appointed Church officers baptized several persons, including Joseph SMITH, Sr., Martin HARRIS, and Orrin Porter Rockwell. On this day the Prophet Joseph Smith also received revelations to guide the Church (*cf.* D&C 21).

Important events such as the restoration of priesthood AUTHORITY and the translation and publishing of the Book of Mormon preceded this date, and subsequent revelations and administrative changes defined and expanded Church organization, but Latter-day Saints consider April 6, 1830, as the birthday of the Church.

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## ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

Latter-day Saints "believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely,

apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth" (A of F 6). They believe that Jesus Christ bestowed his PRIESTHOOD on those he called and appointed to positions of responsibility in the church he organized. They believe that in the "Primitive Church" a person had to be "called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands, by those who [were] in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof" (A of F 5, *cf.* John 15:16; 20:22–23; Acts 6:6; 13:1–3). The Church established by Christ provided for a general leadership composed of apostles and prophets, with each local congregation under the direction of an "overseer," a bishop. The apostles were charged to bear the good news of the GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST to all the world and to organize converts into churches or mutually supportive communities of saints.

The latter-day restoration of this administrative structure is distinctive, but shares some features retained also by Protestant and Catholic traditions. It resembles Protestantism in its attempt to return to the basic doctrines and procedures of the early Church. However, it shares a more Catholic conviction of the need for authoritative church leadership and a centralized organization. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is particularly distinctive in its belief in the leadership of living PROPHETS who guide it through REVELATION.

The LDS position is in agreement with the several allusions to Church structure in the NEW TESTAMENT. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul describes the organization of the Church as "first apostles [*apostoloi*, "sent ones," *i.e.*, representatives, agents], secondarily prophets." In Ephesians 2:20, the Church at Ephesus is said to be "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." Three of the apostles—PETER, JAMES, and JOHN—are clearly a leading group (like a FIRST PRESIDENCY), and Peter seems to lead this group in initiating authoritative action and receiving revelation (Matt. 16:18; Acts 1–5; 8–10). Latter-day Saints regard Peter as the prophet or president of the Church in New Testament times.

The early church also had BISHOPS (*episkopoi*, "overseers, supervisors," 1 Tim. 3:1), ELDERS (*presbúteroi*, Acts 15:22; 16:4; 20:17, where a council of elders is grouped with the apostles), TEACHERS (*didaskaloi*, 1 Cor. 12:28, here men-