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PAUL H. PETERSON

REGION, REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

Regions are intermediate geographic units positioned between the STAKE and the general AREA levels of administration in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 1990, 447 regions around the world consisted of two to six stakes per region in close geographical proximity, each stake being comprised of between four and ten local WARDS of 200 to 700 members each. Groups of ten to forty regions are organized into areas determined by geographic and administrative convenience. Each area is presided over by three seventies who constitute the area presidency.

Regional Representatives are part-time lay officers of the Church that are called by the First Presidency, receive general instructions from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and serve under the direction of the area presidency. Because Regional Representatives do not preside as line officers, they serve without counselors, and stake presidencies report directly to area presidencies. A Regional Representative may preside at a stake conference when assigned.

The principal responsibility of a Regional Representative is to train stake leaders. This training may take place through personal visits, regional council meetings consisting of the stake presidencies in the region, stake CONFERENCES, or other leadership meetings. A Regional Representative has no authority to call local leaders or to counsel individual members in connection with personal matters, but serves as an organizational link providing information and feedback between local Church officers and the General Authorities at area or Church headquarters.

A Regional Representative serves for a period determined by the First Presidency, typically five years. The first Regional Representatives were called in October 1967, and with the growth of the Church, the number has increased steadily.

With the approval of the area presidency, the regional council may organize occasional conferences, special training, athletic competitions, or other events. For members who might otherwise be somewhat isolated or limited by circumstance, such occasions provide perspective, motivation, and exposure to other members and to Church leaders.

[See also Organization: Contemporary.]

DOUGLAS L. CALLISTER
GERALD J. DAY

REINCARNATION

Reincarnation refers to a theory that one SPIRIT (life or soul) passes from one material body to another through repeated births and deaths, usually of the same species, often with ethical implications; thus the present life is viewed as only one of many. This theory is rejected by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The idea of repeated return or of a continuing, exacting wheel of rebirth is based on the Eastern doctrine of karma. Karma literally means "deeds" or "actions" and, in a limited sense, may refer to a system of cause and effect. According to this belief, all inequalities of birth, society, race, and economic being are products of one's individual karma created by an accumulation of previous behavior. Karma is also seen as a cosmic law of justice. It is an eternally moving wheel of rebirth. Experience is repeatable. An individual spirit can live again and again in a wide variety of guises and forms in the mortal estate.

In Latter-day Saint doctrine, mankind is on the road to IMMORTALITY and ETERNAL LIFE. One moves from one type of existence to another along the way. But this teaching is distinguishable from reincarnation on several counts:

1. In Latter-day Saint belief, there is only one physical death for any one person (Heb. 9:27). Amulek, in the Book of Mormon, taught that man can die only once (Alma 11:45). Reincarnation posits many deaths, but in Latter-day Saint thought, the RESURRECTION (incarnation) follows death (cf. D&C 29:24–25).
2. In LDS theology, the PHYSICAL BODY is sacred, and its elements are imperishable. The body is prerequisite to becoming like God. In reincarna-

tion, the present physical body is of little or no consequence.

3. In LDS theology, mortality is a time to be tested and proved “to see if [people] will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abr. 3:25). In reincarnation, there are many future lives, so there is no urgent need to repent now. Reincarnation contradicts Amulek’s admonition that “this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God” (Alma 34:32). The Prophet Joseph SMITH said that transmigration of souls (spirits) was not a correct principle (*TPJS*, pp. 104–105).

4. In LDS theology, there is one single, unique historical act of redemption made by Jesus Christ. Through it, Christ becomes the only name under heaven “whereby man can be saved” (D&C 18:23). Reincarnation denies the absolute centrality of Christ’s atonement by affirming the theoretical existence of an abundance of equally miraculous deities, who appear in a variety of forms, born again and again.

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SPENCER J. PALMER

RELIEF SOCIETY

The Relief Society is the official adult women’s organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and is an essential part of the structure of the Church at general, STAKE, and WARD levels. The organization provides opportunities for association, leadership, COMPASSIONATE SERVICE, and education. Through the Relief Society, “women of the Church are given some measure of divine authority particularly in the direction of government and instruction in behalf of the women of the church” (J. F. Smith, p. 5).

The motto “Charity Never Faileth” expresses the commitment of Relief Society members to love and nurture one another and to minister graciously to the needs of Church members and others. The binding sense of SISTERHOOD that characterizes the Relief Society is founded upon the women’s common faith and enhanced by the lessons, activities, and interpersonal involvements that consti-

tute the Relief Society program. Current lesson materials for a weekly Sunday class focus twice a month on spiritual themes; the other two weeks have lessons on compassionate service and on home and family education. Lessons on cultural refinement and varied interests provide an optional midweek activity for interested sisters. Once a month, a midweek homemaking meeting features instructions for visiting teachers, a short home management lesson, and miniclasses emphasizing homemaking arts, WELFARE SERVICES projects, and individual and family development. Members especially appointed as “visiting teachers” are expected to make regular contacts with each woman once a month in her home, or more often if needed.

When the Prophet Joseph Smith organized the Female Relief Society of NAUVOO in 1842, he stated that the restored Church of Jesus Christ



Joseph and Emma Smith, by Florence Hansen (1978, cast bronze), Nauvoo Monument to Women, LDS Church Visitors Center, Nauvoo, Illinois. Joseph Smith is shown giving a five-dollar gold piece to Emma Smith, his wife and the first general president of the Relief Society. When he organized the society, he stated: “All I have to give to the poor I shall give to this society” (Minutes, Mar. 17, 1842, p. 13).