SEXUALITY

In LDS life and thought, sexuality consists of attitudes, feelings, and desires that are God-given and central to God’s plan for his children, but they are not the central motivating force in human action. Sexual feelings are to be governed by each individual within boundaries the Lord has set. Sexuality is not characterized as a need, or a deprivation that must be satisfied, but as a desire that should be fulfilled only within marriage, with sensitive attention given to the well-being of one’s heterosexual marriage partner. As the offspring of God, humans carry the divine LIGHT OF CHRIST, which is the means whereby the appropriate expression of sexual desires can be measured. Depending on whether men and women are true or false to this light, they will be the masters or the victims of sexual feelings. Such desires are to be fulfilled only within legal heterosexual marriage, wherein sexual involvement is to be an expression of unity, compassion, commitment, and love. Mutuality and equality are to be the hallmark of a married couple’s physical intimacy.

The purposes of appropriate sexual relations in marriage include the expression and building of joy, unity, love, and oneness. To be “one flesh” is to experience an emotional and spiritual unity. This oneness is of fundamental importance as is procreation. President Spencer W. Kimball stated:

The union of the sexes, husband and wife [and only husband and wife], was for the principal purpose of bringing children into the world. Sexual experiences were never intended by the Lord to be mere plaything or merely to satisfy passions and lusts. We know of no directive from the Lord that proper sexual experience between husbands and wives need be limited totally to the procreation of children, but we find much evidence from Adam until now that no provision was ever made by the Lord for indiscriminate sex [1975, p. 4].

Furthermore, as Paul noted, “Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife” (1 Cor. 7:3–4). Thus, physical intimacy is a blessing to married couples when it is an expression of their mutual benevolence and commitment to each other’s well-being, an affirmation of their striving to be emotionally and spiritually one. The key in sexual matters is unselfishness. Self-centered pursuit of physical desire is destructive of the unity and love that characterize healthy marital relations. Such love or charity is long-suffering, kind, not envious, does “not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not [one’s] own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil” (1 Cor. 13:4–5), and is compatible with the light of Christ, which directs all in the ways of righteousness.

Bringing children into a loving home is considered a sacred privilege and responsibility of husbands and wives. Given that context, BIRTH CONTROL is a matter left to the prayerful, mutual decisions of a righteous couple, with the counsel that husbands must be considerate of their wives, who experience the greater physical and emotional demands in bearing children. A woman’s health and strength are to be preserved in childbearing; thus, wisdom should govern how a husband and wife carry out the responsibility to become parents and to care for their offspring.

Sexual feelings in the mature man or woman are relatively strong and constant, and they are not evil. An early apostle of this dispensation, Parley P. Pratt, noted:

Some persons have supposed that our natural affections were the results of a fallen and corrupt nature, and that they are “carnal, sensual, and devilish,” and therefore ought to be resisted, subdued, or overcome as so many evils which prevent our perfection, or progress in the spiritual life. . . . Our natural affections are planted in us by the Spirit of God, for a wise purpose; and they are the very main-springs of life and happiness—they are the cement of all virtuous and heavenly society—they are the essence of charity, or love. . . . There is not a more pure and holy principle in existence than the affection which glows in the bosom of a virtuous man for his companion [p. 52].

As with any appetite or passion, physical desire can be distorted, overindulged, or misused. Spencer W. Kimball observed that, as in all other aspects of marriage, there are virtues to be observed in sexual matters: “There are some people who have said that behind the bedroom doors anything goes. That is not true and the Lord would not condone it” (Kimball, 1982, p. 312).

The Church prohibits sexual involvement except between a man and woman who are lawfully married to each other. Latter-day Saints are ex-
pected to abstain from sexual intercourse prior to marriage and to honor the marriage covenant by confining sexual relations to the spouse only \(\text{(see chastity, premarital sex)}\). Sexual morality also requires abstention from activities that arouse desires not expressible until marriage. Sexual abstinence prior to marriage is considered not only right and possible but also beneficial. Abstinence is not viewed as repression, nor are there any particular negative consequences to so living.

Parents have the obligation to teach their children both the goodness—the sacredness—of the power to create life \(\text{(see procreation)}\) and the principles of maturation and sexual development. Church leaders encourage parents to discuss sexuality openly with their children, answering their questions straightforwardly and contrasting the Lord’s plan for his children—which includes the potential ability to produce children themselves—with the ways this power to create life can be profaned or abused. Children are to be prepared while young and, according to appropriate stages of development, to be taught regarding human reproduction and the emotional and spiritual meanings of the procreative power and sexual desires that will grow within them \(\text{(see sex education)}\). Parents are expected to teach correct principles and to be examples of what they teach, treating each other with compassion and charity and living in a relationship of absolute fidelity.

Fundamental to all parental instruction is a parent-child relationship of love and trust. Youth are vulnerable to sexual enticements both because of the strength of their developing desires and because they are still growing in understanding and responsibility. Full comprehension of the consequences—to themselves and to succeeding generations—of the failure to abstain sexually may not come simultaneously with their sexual interests. Trust and respect for parents can help insulate adolescents from temptation while their capacity to exercise full rights and responsibilities matures.

Parents’ responsibility to educate children sensitively and directly should not be delegated to the public schools or other agencies outside the home. When public sex-education programs are offered, LDS parents are counseled to assure that such programs adequately acknowledge the sanctity of marriage and promote family-oriented values and standards. When such agencies undertake sex education, LDS parents should have prepared and taught their children in such a way that school programs will at best be a supplement to the foundations of understanding established in the family circle.

The standard of sexual morality endorsed by the Church applies equally to men and women. Given that the power to create life is central to God’s plan for his children, sexual transgression is most serious \(\text{(see adultery)}\). Those who violate the law of chastity may be subject to Church disciplinary procedures, designed to help them cease their transgressions and restore them to full fellowship. Whether it is adultery, fornication, sexual abuse, incest, rape, perversion, or any other unholy practices, such behavior is to be addressed vigorously by local Church authorities, who seek the repentance of perpetrators and the protection of any victims. Homosexual relationships are prohibited \(\text{(see homosexuality)}\). In such cases, the Church affirms that such distortions in sexual feelings or behavior can, with the Lord’s help, be overcome. A compassionate interest in the well-being of transgressors and the healing of relationships should motivate Church interest and action. Sexual wrongdoing is not to be condoned, ignored, or addressed casually. Transgressors themselves can be forgiven, but only by repenting and coming unto Christ \(\text{(see repentance)}\) and, through his atonement, turning away from their destructive beliefs and practices.

Victims of rape or incest often experience trauma and feelings of guilt, but they are not responsible for the evil done by others, and they deserve and need to be restored to their sense of innocence through the love and counsel of Church leaders.

Practically speaking, the benefits of living a chaste life prior to marriage and of observing a relationship of fidelity after marriage apply to every dimension of marriage and family relationships. By remaining chaste before marriage and totally faithful to one’s spouse in a heterosexual marriage, one can avoid some physically debilitating diseases, extramarital pregnancies, and venereal infections passed on to offspring. The sense of trust, loyalty, love, and commitment essential to the ideal of oneness in marriage and family life is not damaged or strained. Furthermore, one’s relationship to and confidence in God are strengthened. By governing the power to create life, one sets the stage for the exercise of these desires, not whimsically, but with a reverence for the sacredness of the divine powers of creation.
SICK, BLESSING THE

Latter-day Saints are committed to the reality of healing through faith in Jesus Christ, to a health code (the word of wisdom) that is a form of preventive medicine, and to the proper use of modern medical skills.

Latter-day Saints believe that Christ ordained and sent his disciples, in ancient and modern times, with the promise that through faith they might heal. The gift of healing is one of the gifts of the Spirit, a gift that may be present both in the one who administers and the one who receives. The admonition of James is reenacted in LDS practice. “Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:14–15; cf. D&C 42:43–44).

It is clear from modern revelation that even though not all have this gift of faith, they may still have faith in Christ and the gospel. In many LDS homes there is exercise of the gift of healing through administrations of the father’s priesthood. Blessings of the sick are generally given by two Melchizedek Priesthood bearers. There are no prescribed prayers for this kind of blessing, but one of the priesthood bearers anoints the head of the sick person with a little consecrated olive oil and says in substance: “In the name of Jesus Christ and by authority of the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood, I lay my hands upon your head and anoint you with this consecrated oil, which has been dedicated for the blessing of the sick.” Additional words may be said in harmony with, and under the guidance of, the Spirit.

Following this anointing, two or more priesthood bearers lay their hands upon the head of the sick person, and one being spokesman calls the person by name and says in substance, “In the name of Jesus Christ and by the authority of the holy Melchizedek Priesthood, we seal and confirm upon you this anointing with which you have been anointed to the end that . . . .” He then voices a prayer of supplication and of blessing as the Spirit directs. The ordinance concludes in the name of Jesus Christ. If two priesthood bearers are not available for the ceremony, one may perform both parts of the blessing.

In the temples of the Church throughout the world, frequent prayers are offered for those who are sick, bereaved, or in need. The names of those afflicted may be placed upon a temple prayer roll by request of family or friends. This practice derives from abundant scriptural counsels regarding unity in prayer—“Be agreed as touching all things ye shall ask” (D&C 27:18)—and the conviction that the modern temple, as anciently, is a house of prayer (D&C 109:8). United prayer and fasting, sometimes by an entire ward or stake and in some historic instances by the full world membership of the Church, is occasionally advocated. This

A young woman receives a Melchizedek Priesthood blessing of comfort and, if it is God’s will, healing. The elders anoint the sick with consecrated olive oil (see James 5:14). Photograph, 1986; courtesy Floyd Holdman.