762). The faithful elders and sisters who depart this life “continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption . . . Among those who are in darkness” (D&C 138:57; Smith, p. 461; see also SALVATION OF THE DEAD).

Bruce R. McConkie explained, “Until the death of Christ these two spirit abodes [paradise and hell] were separated by a great gulf, with the intermingling of their respective inhabitants strictly forbidden (Luke 16:19–31). After our Lord bridged the gulf between the two (1 Pet. 3:18–21; Moses 7:37–39), the affairs of his kingdom in the spirit world were so arranged that righteous spirits began teaching the gospel to wicked ones” (MD, p. 762).

An important LDS doctrine states that Jesus Christ inaugurated the preaching of the gospel and organized a mission in the spirit world during his ministry there between his death and resurrection. This is the substance of a revelation recorded as Doctrine and Covenants section 138. Since Jesus’ visit there, the gospel has been taught vigorously in the spirit world (see SPIRIT PRISON).

The relative conditions and state of mind in the two spheres of the postmortal spirit world are described by the Prophet Joseph Smith: “The spirits of the just are exalted to a greater and more glorious work; hence they are blessed in their departure to the world of spirits. Enveloped in flaming fire, they are not far from us, and know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions, and are often pained therewith” (TPJS, p. 326). On the other hand, “The great misery of departed spirits in the world of spirits, where they go after death, is to know that they come short of the glory that others enjoy and that they might have enjoyed themselves, and they are their own accusers” (TPJS, pp. 310–11).

A statement regarding conditions in the spirit world among the righteous was given in 1856 by Jedediah M. Grant, a member of the First Presidency. He had related to President Heber C. Kimball a vision he had had of the spirit world, which President Kimball subsequently discussed at Grant’s funeral a few days later on December 4, 1856. Although an unofficial statement, it represents concepts generally held by Latter-day Saints. A summary follows: Jedediah Grant saw the righteous gathered together in the spirit world; there were no wicked spirits among them. There were order, government, and organization. Among the righteous there was no disorder, darkness, or confusion. They were organized into families, and there was “perfect harmony.” He saw his wife, with whom he conversed, and many other persons whom he knew. There was “a deficiency in some” families, because some individuals “had not honored their calling” on earth and therefore were not “permitted to . . . dwell together.” The buildings were exceptionally attractive, far exceeding in beauty his opinion of Solomon’s temple. Gardens were more beautiful than any he had seen on earth, with “flowers of numerous kinds.” After experiencing “the beauty and glory of the spirit world” among the righteous spirits, he regretted having to return to his body in mortality (JD 4:135–36).

Since all who have possessed a body in mortality will be resurrected, a time will ultimately come when the postmortal spirit world pertaining to this earth will cease to exist as the earth will become the celestial home for resurrected beings (MD, p. 762).

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SPORTS
The LDS Church was a pioneer among religious faiths in promoting physical activity, sports, and recreation for members (Parkin, p. 67). Joseph Smith, the first Prophet of the Church, enjoyed and excelled in running, wrestling, jumping, and playing ball. Brigham Young, his successor, taught that recreation (including sports) is a spiritual activity that develops not only the body but also the mind and the spirit. He encouraged the building of recreation halls in conjunction with chapels for worship (Parkin, p. 15). These halls, later called cultural halls, are still part of a meetinghouse and are used extensively for sports, recreational, and cultural activities.

During the early years of the Church, participation in sports was informal. But gradually programs became well structured. In 1904 in Salt Lake City, one of the earliest leagues for “outdoor activities and friendly competition” was organized
Basketball at Brigham Young Academy was originally a women’s sport. This team in 1900 won the championship. The Church encourages members to live a well-rounded life, including the development of physical skills and a healthy body. From the Brigham Young University Centennial Collection.

(Strong, p. 101–102). In 1904 and for a few years thereafter, an annual field day that included a variety of athletic activities was held in the Salt Lake Valley. The first formal basketball league for boys was started in Salt Lake City in 1908. During the decade 1910–1920, competition in baseball and basketball spread from the Salt Lake Valley to many other LDS settlements.

The completion of the Deseret Gymnasium in 1910, near the Salt Lake Temple, made it apparent that Church leaders continued to encourage physical activity and sports. The facility included a gymnasium, a swimming pool, bowling lanes, tennis courts, and dressing rooms. It accommodated sports and exercise activities for both men and women (Deseret Evening News, Sept. 20, 1910, p. 5). By 1922, gym membership exceeded four thousand.

The 1911 June Conference sessions for activity leaders of individual Wards (congregations) focused on volleyball, wrestling, fencing, swimming, gymnastics, running, jumping, vaulting, and baseball (IE 14 [June 1911]:751–52). In 1922 Church leaders issued formal guidelines for recreation and sports. “The recreation program under the direction of the MIA [a Church program that served youth and young adults] must do more than provide amusement. Through it we must emphasize the fundamental ideals and standards of the Church. Ours is the opportunity to enrich leisure, to spiritualize recreation” (M.I.A. Activity Manual, p. 5).

By 1926 team sports such as baseball, basketball, and soccer, and lifelong activities such as walking, hiking, camping, tennis, swimming, skating, and dancing, were being encouraged. At this time the need for emphasis on sportsmanship came into focus. Quoting Walter Camp, one leader counseled, “Play fair, but play hard, win if you can, lose if you must, but take a whipping without whimpering” (Recreation Organization and Leadership, pp. 50–51). Leaders taught that the desire to win should not be so intense that participants could not enjoy the game.

For two decades following World War II, “all-Church” tournaments flourished in sports such as basketball, softball, and volleyball, and to a lesser degree in tennis, golf, and horseshoes. By 1962 more than 3,500 basketball teams and 50,000 players were involved. Teams came to Salt Lake City not only from neighboring states but also from as far away as Washington, D.C., Canada, and Mexico (Church News, Feb. 24, 1962, p. 9).

In 1963 Elder Ezra Taft Benson, later to become the thirteenth President of the Church, spoke to more than 1,400 participants attending the all-Church softball tournament banquet. “This is the greatest softball tournament in the world. Its purpose is to build men, men of character, men of strength, and faith, to build testimonies, to build men who love the Lord” (Church News, Aug. 31, 1963, p. 4). So popular was all-Church tournament competition in the major sports involved that it grew to include three divisions of play: juniors (ages 16–17), seniors (ages 18–29), and college students. Televised finals, devotional meetings, banquets, and other features of highly organized competitive sports became the custom for all-Church tournaments. Sportsmanship trophies, superior in importance and appearance to championship trophies, became a highlight of the tournaments.

Worldwide Church growth in the 1960s made it impractical to continue these popular tournaments. In 1971 Church leaders announced that sports would henceforth be emphasized on a local basis and teams would no longer travel to Salt Lake City. Where practical, tournaments were to be held in various regions of the Church (New Era 1 [Sept. 1971]:44–45). This change accommodated larger numbers of new members with differing interests in sports appropriate to their cultures.
Today LDS meetinghouses continue to have large cultural halls that accommodate sports and recreation. With more than 15,000 wards in the Church in 1900, combined male and female sports participation in three selected team sports is estimated to be as follows: basketball, 552,000; softball, 690,000; volleyball, 207,000.

Since the first printed guidelines in 1922, Church authorities have continued to provide local leaders with instructions that give purpose and direction to Church sports: "Sports programs should provide year-round opportunity for involvement and should include a wide variety of individual and team sports. All who have a desire to participate should have the opportunity" (Physical Fitness, Sports, and Recreation Manual, p. 17). President David O. McKay aptly summarized the position of the Church on sports and play when he taught that practicing Mormons work, worship, pray, and play (Family Home Evening Manual, p. iii).

Since 1977 the coordination and leadership of Church sports have been the responsibility of activities committees at the ward and stake levels. These committees give local leadership to cultural arts, socials, service projects, and sports. Regional (three to six stakes), multiregional (fifteen to thirty stakes), and area sports directors are called as needed to organize and supervise tournaments in the eighteen designated geographical areas of the worldwide Church.

The Church also supports a full intercollegiate athletic program at Brigham Young University and BYU—Hawaii. But beyond intercollegiate athletics, both schools have large intramural programs that serve thousands of students.

The Church promotes both physical and spiritual fitness for all members. Sports for females have somewhat paralleled sports for males through the years, except that all-Church tournaments for women in team sports have never been held. Characteristic of the Church sports program from the beginning is that there is no practice or play on Sunday.

[See also Physical Fitness; Recreation.]

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STAKE

Stakes are an intermediate unit of organization between Church headquarters and the local wards. A stake ordinarily comprises between five and twelve wards, totaling at least 3,000 members. Depending on LDS population density, a stake may cover only a small part of one city or include many towns or cities spread over hundreds of miles. Where there are not sufficient Latter-day Saints to organize functioning wards, members belong to branches, which are supervised by missions or stakes. The stake is "a miniature Church to the Saints in a specific geographic area" (Benson, p. 4); the stake presidency is fully charged and authorized to implement all the programs of the Church within the stake boundaries and directly supervises the bishops of wards. Stake presidents are supervised by area presidencies, who report directly to the presiding quorums of the Church. For the sake of administrative convenience, training and support are provided to geographically proximate stakes by regional representatives.