Despite traditions and beliefs that recognize and honor the ways in which value decisions led to the death and martyrdom of Jesus Christ and of Joseph Smith, there is no support in LDS doctrine for anyone intentionally seeking death.

The ancient commandment “Thou shalt not kill” is interpreted in most traditions to include a prohibition against killing oneself. In LDS doctrine, “Thou shalt not kill” has been extended to “nor do anything like unto it” (D&C 59:6). This extension is relevant in considering a variety of life-threatening behaviors that suicidologists identify as suicide equivalents (e.g., death as a result of deliberate reckless driving) or “slow suicide” (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse).

Suicide prevention is sometimes criticized by people who claim that individuals have an innate right to do whatever they want with their lives, including a right to kill themselves if they want to. Suicide, however, is never fully an individual matter. Even when difficult physical and biological factors are present, suicide is a social act, with interpersonal, family, and social systems ramifications.

A social milieu organized to help people find adequate housing and life goals of learning, loving, and working provides genuine choices between life and death. It is the position of the Church that when there are such choices, the majority of people, including those who are suicidal, will choose life. This is to deny inequity, unfairness, conflict, instability, evil, aging, and illness of loved ones, but to provide a basis for behavior so that when crises occur, they will be seen as resolvable.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CLYDE E. SULLIVAN

SUNDAY

Whereas the seventh or SABBATH DAY was established as a day of rest and worship and a commemoration of the Creation (Ex. 20:10–11), the “first day of the week” Sunday, or the Lord’s Day, was consecrated to remember the atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). Moreover, a new ORDINANCE, the SACRAMENT, was introduced so that Christian wor-
Church’s custom of worshiping weekly in countries in the Middle East on a day other than Sunday.

As President Joseph F. Smith explained, Latter-day Saints are to gather on a day to “mingle with the saints that their moral and spiritual influence may help to correct our false impressions and restore us to that life which the duties and obligations of our conscience and true religion impose upon us” (Smith, p. 243; see D&C 59:9–19).

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Smith, Joseph F. GD, pp. 241–47. Salt Lake City, 1939.

GLEN E. BARKSDALE

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is held weekly in each local ward or branch. It lasts about an hour. Each Sunday, ward members assemble at the meetinghouse chapel for prayer and hymn singing, following which those twelve years and older attend age-group classes for religious instruction while younger children attend primary. The Sunday School courses provide a forum for discussions, socialization, and the integration of gospel principles into everyday life. The adult curriculum includes a gospel doctrine course based on the standard works, a gospel essentials class, and elective alternative classes on family history, teacher development, and family relations. The courses of study between twelve and eighteen are coeducational and focus on gospel principles, teachings of the Savior, Church history, scripture study, and the lives and teachings of the modern prophets. Under the direction of a three-person Sunday School presidency in each ward or branch, members are called to serve as the course teachers, usually for a term of several years.

Earliest Sunday Schools. Following the organization of the Church in 1830, most Sunday gatherings were general meetings for all members and visitors. In good weather, large meetings were usually held outdoors. The Prophet Joseph Smith notes, for example, on July 3, 1842, at Nauvoo, Illinois, “This morning I preached at the grove to about 8,000 people” (HC 5:56). Smaller groups met in homes or other buildings. Those meetings typically included praying, singing, partaking of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, and preaching.

Before the exodus from Nauvoo that followed the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith in 1844, a few small Sunday School groups met regularly in scattered communities, notably in Nauvoo, Kirtland, and various cities in England. Only after the Saints arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, however, did Sunday School begin to take on its present form.

In May 1849, Richard Ballantyne began plans to start a Sunday School to educate the young people in the principles of the gospel and the scriptures. Some years before, in his native Scotland, he had organized a Sunday School in the Relief Presbyterian Church of which he was then a member. Having no suitable place in his Salt Lake City neighborhood for such a gathering, Ballantyne built a structure to serve both as his home and a place to hold Sunday School. Today, a monument on the northeast corner of 100 West and 300 South streets in Salt Lake City commemorates the location of this first Sunday School. The original building was eighteen feet wide and twenty feet long, furnished with wooden benches, and warmed by a stone fireplace.

On Sunday, December 9, 1849, Ballantyne gathered a group of fifty children into his newly completed home for instruction from the scriptures. Of his purpose Ballantyne wrote, “There is growth in the young. The seed sown in their hearts is more likely to bring forth fruit than when sown in the hearts of those who are more advanced in years” (Sonne, p. 51). Disturbed by observing children at play on the Sabbath day and sensing that their spiritual growth was being neglected, he added, “I wanted to gather them into the school where they could learn not to read and write, but the goodness of God, and the true Gospel of salvation given by Jesus Christ” (Sonne, p. 51).

The following year the Fourteenth Ward, in which Richard Ballantyne was serving as second counselor to Bishop John Murdock, completed its meeting house, and the rapidly growing Sunday School was moved from the Ballantyne home to the new building. The expanding Sunday School class was also divided into a number of smaller classes with additional teachers being called into