
TEACHERS, TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Latter-day Saints consider Jesus the master teacher who sets the example. He commissioned his disciples to teach, and still admonishes members of his Church to “teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom” (D&C 88:77). In the Church, therefore, lessons are taught regularly in ward and branch programs—PRIESTHOOD, RELIEF SOCIETY, SUNDAY SCHOOL, YOUTH organizations, HOME TEACHING and VISITING TEACHING, MISSIONARY work, SEMINARY classes, and FAMILY HOME EVENINGS. Instruction is intended to help members understand the principles Christ has taught in his life and through the prophets and apply them in their daily lives. This gospel-centered purpose of teaching was characterized by Joseph SMITH when he explained concerning Church members: “I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves” (MS 13:339). Teachers are counseled to study, to seek, and to teach with the spirit (D&C 42:14).

Teaching the gospel is a duty implicit in Church membership. Responsibility for teaching, either directly or indirectly, is an element of virtually every Church calling. Each fully staffed ward requires more than thirty people in formal weekly teaching assignments, and so there are now an estimated 400,000 teachers Churchwide. Almost every active member will be called to serve at times as a teacher. Teaching is considered also as an opportunity to strengthen the teacher’s own faith and knowledge through study and service to others.

A Teacher Development program designed to help teachers understand the principles of learning and gain confidence in their teaching ability is offered in most local units. This eight-week program advocates the use of learning objectives determined by preassessment of student needs and ability, and stresses the divine aspects of a Church teacher’s calling.

Scripture-based lesson manuals are provided for each class. These bring a degree of consistency to the curriculum throughout the Church and offer teaching structures for the inexperienced teacher. The manuals suggest supporting resources from other Church publications and from a wide variety of materials produced by the Church Curriculum Department. These materials are generally made available in local meetinghouse or stake libraries.

Extensive catalogues of teaching resources are maintained and published regularly to encourage their use in the classroom and the home.

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TEACHING THE GOSPEL

Among Latter-day Saints, the ultimate purpose of teaching the gospel is the transformation of lives. Neither the process of intensive study nor the knowledge gained is an end in itself. In addition to lecture and conceptual approaches, gospel teaching often follows a skill-learning model, in which a skill to be learned or quality to be developed such as prayer, kindness, or service is modeled or exemplified. Learners are encouraged to apply their new or renewed insight. As soon as possible, they become teachers themselves. Thus, teaching is the art of directing activities. Corrective responses from teacher and learner continue until the skill is incorporated into character. In the Church the gaps between priest and layman, teacher and learner, and leader and follower are all but erased. Teaching is a universal and inclusive mode of participation. Results are most impressive when family, church, and community cooperate and support each other’s efforts.

Guidelines for teaching the gospel are often summarized in three imperatives:

1. Teach from the scriptures and teach the content of the scriptures. The STANDARD WORKS are studied systematically in recurring cycles, and this pattern is correlated for all age groups, AUXILIARIES, and PRIESTHOOD QUORUMS.
2. Teach by the Spirit, meaning under the influence of the HOLY GHOST. “If ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach” (D&C 42:14). “No man can preach the Gospel without the Holy Ghost” (*TPJS*, p. 112).