VALUES, TRANSMISSION OF

Like other religious organizations, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is concerned about transmitting its values to its young people. Its youth are viewed as future leaders, teachers, and parents who will one day influence the growth and success of other Church members, including their own children. Of central interest to the Church is helping young people gain a foundation of basic values that will have vital influence on later behavior and future religious development.

The process of transmitting these values is neither simple nor easy. It focuses on the conditions and experiences of home and family. Domestic factors have the greatest potential for positive or negative influence in a child’s life. In addition, the Church provides a multi-faceted support program in the form of the second-strongest influences—leaders, teachers, and advisers seen by youth as credible, respected, and approachable adults.

The Lord has commanded parents, first and foremost, to teach their children the gospel (D&C 68:25–28; cf. Deut. 6:7; 2 Ne. 25:23–27; Jacob 3:10; 4:2–5). This obligation cannot be delegated. President David O. McKay taught, “The home is the first and most effective place for children to learn the lessons of life. . . . No other success can compensate for failure in the home” (Family Home Evening Manual, p. iii; also quoting J. E. McCulloch, Home: The Savior of Civilization [Washington, D.C., 1924], p. 24). Church leaders continue to stress the need for parents to teach values in the home.

Church support for parental duties was apparent as early as President Brigham Young: “Let the keynote of your work be the establishment in the youth of an individual testimony of the truth and magnitude of the great Latter-day work, and the development of the gifts within them” (GD, p. 391).

Well-documented trends throughout the world give ample reason for concern about young people. Although the level and intensity of problematic social behaviors are lower among active, involved LDS youth (see Social Characteristics), there are so many negative influences that the reinforcement of traditional Christian values has become a persistent concern of the Church.

Prevention is the preferred mode of addressing potential problems among the youth of the Church, and the best preventative efforts are those that do indeed inculcate values. Such efforts take several approaches: formal and informal, and systematic, localized, and individualized.

The Church regularly provides its youth with educational instruction, service opportunities, social activities, role models, leadership experiences, speaking opportunities, teaching assignments, and frequent personal interviews with ecclesiastical
leaders. The settings for these efforts are primary for children, young women for girls twelve to eighteen, Aaronic Priesthood quorums and young men for boys twelve to eighteen. Church-sponsored sports programs, Sunday School classes, summer camps, youth conferences, firesides, scouting, and seminary also supplement the efforts of parents through family home evening and other interaction. The church also publishes the Friend and the New Era, monthly magazines for young children and for youth to age eighteen. Lessons, speeches, and magazine articles designed for the youth of the Church are usually based on personal experiences, scriptural models, or values stressed by the Presidents of the Church.

Youth growing up in the Church advance through a series of stages in their maturation that give some structure to their formation of religious values. At the age of eight, girls and boys are prepared by their parents and teachers for baptism and are interviewed by their bishop before they are baptized and confirmed. Baptism and confirmation are occasions for individual attention, as well as family participation and celebration. From a young age children are encouraged to bear their testimony in Church meetings and in the home, and are asked to memorize the Articles of Faith in order to graduate from Primary. Young men typically are ordained deacons, teachers, and priests in the Aaronic Priesthood at the ages of twelve, fourteen, and sixteen, respectively. They are inducted into service and leadership experiences in these ordinations. They also advance through the ranks of the scouting program, where the values of the Scout Law are taught. Young women from twelve to eighteen, similarly advance through a program of study and activity that involve the setting and achieving of many value-shaping goals. In addition, most young people in the Church receive a patriarchal blessing during their teenage years. This may serve as an influential personal guide to the values and goals they will adopt for the rest of their lives.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Church conducted studies of the process of value acquisition and program effectiveness, first within the Young Women organization and later within a U.S. sample of young men (Weed, Condie, Hafen, and Warner; "Key to Strong Young Men"). These studies validated the Church's placing emphasis on the family as the most important agent for the transmission of values. Home religious observance was the strongest predictor of positive outcomes and explained more of the difference between young men's religious intention and behavior than all other factors combined. Home religious observance included the examples set by parents, experiences, and activities such as family prayer, family home evening, scripture study, and informal discussions about religion. Indicators of value acquisition included one's intention to be active in the Church, to be morally clean, and to serve as a full-time missionary (see activity in the Church; mission; morality).

A second important factor noted in transmitting values was the nature and quality of interpersonal relationships between the youth and their adult Church leaders. This factor became more significant as boys grew older, with sixteen- to eighteen-year-old boys strongly influenced by Church leaders whom they trusted, respected, and admired, as people in whom they felt they could confide. Having trusted leaders can be especially important to young LDS converts in combining the basic values taught in their homes with Church doctrines and principles.

Home and family, combined with high-quality relationships with Church leaders, were more influential than any particular programs or activities. These results comprised not just a simple tabulation of expression by youth of important influences in their lives but empirical data confirming the relationship between what youth valued and what they actually did.

The implications of the study are both reassuring and disconcerting. It is reassuring to the Church to know that its emphasis on parental responsibility contributes directly and significantly to the goals of the Church for its young people; that its young people, even in the challenging teenage years, are influenced by caring adult leaders; and that value acquisition and religious socialization do not require great expense and elaborate facilities. Less reassuring is the knowledge that many of the programs, activities, and lessons are not as productive by themselves as had been hoped. For the youth, a particular lesson's content may not be as important as who presents it and the mutual relationships of trust, confidence, respect, and admiration that are built between the youth and the presenter. The leader's personality and example of faith apparently carry more weight than the carefully planned curriculum prepared at Church headquarters.

Peers and the Church educational system are also strong value-transmission factors as young
people mature. These factors build on the relationships and activities experienced by teenagers, but as these young people leave home, institutes of religion near college campuses, wards composed of students and singles, and Church institutions of higher learning, such as Brigham Young University, provide young adults with additional opportunities to develop relationships with dedicated leaders and teachers and with peers who have similar values.

For many young men and women, service as a full-time missionary is a powerful experience in the transmission of spiritual values from the Church to the individual. Working as a full-time missionary for eighteen months (for women) or two years (for men) becomes for many a rite of passage from a culturally based religious identity to one that is spiritually based, or internalized. During this time, many benefits of gospel instruction, the baptismal covenant, priesthood ordinations and blessings, and the temple endowment are realized and become securely embedded as one’s ideals for life.

This religious identity gives the young adult an image of what it means to be a religious person, a son or daughter of God, a disciple of Jesus Christ, a member of the Church. Seeing oneself as wanting and striving to be consistent with those images gives much of the meaning and purpose to LDS life. Church members often describe the experience of receiving a witness or testimony from the Holy Ghost as a sacred moment, which contributes to, or further solidifies, their commitment to the gospel of Christ and their personal identity within the community of Saints.

[See also Individuality; Leadership Training.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY


STAN E. WEED

VIEW OF THE HEBREWS

Ethan Smith’s View of the Hebrews (Poultony, Vt., 1823; second enlarged edition, 1825) combines scriptural citations and reports from various observers among American Indians and Jews to support the claim that the Indians were the descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. It is one of several books reflecting the popular fascination at the time of Joseph Smith with the question of Indian origins. While some have claimed it to be a source for the Book of Mormon, no direct connections between this book and the Book of Mormon have been demonstrated.

The full title of the 1825 edition is View of the Hebrews; or the Tribes of Israel in America. Exhibiting the Destruction of Jerusalem; the Certain Restoration of Judah and Israel; the Present State of Judah and Israel; and an Address of the Prophet Isaiah to the United States Relative to Their Restoration. The author, Ethan Smith (no relation to Joseph Smith), was pastor of the Congregational church in Poultony, Vermont.

The first chapter deals with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by the Romans, as referred to in scriptural prophecy and historical sources. The second chapter tells of the literal expulsion of the Ten Tribes of Israel in 721 B.C. and the establishment of the kingdom of Judah; it also maintains that their restoration will be literal, and it quotes heavily from Isaiah. The third chapter summarizes the outcast condition of Israel in 1823; it also argues that the natives of America are “the descendants of Israel” and propounds that all pre-Columbian Americans had one origin, that their language appears originally to have been Hebrew, that they had an ark of the covenant, that they practiced circumcision, that they acknowledged one and only one God, that their tribal structure was similar to Hebrew organization, that they had cities of refuge, and that they manifest a variety of Hebraic traits of prophetic character and tradition. These claims are supported by citations from James Adair and Alexander von Humboldt. The fourth chapter emphasizes the restoration of Israel, quoting from Isaiah and using Isaiah chapter 18 to create an “Address” to the United States to save Israel. In conclusion, Ethan Smith pleads that the “supplanters of God in the West” be faithful and helpful in bringing scattered Israel “to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the Mount Zion.”

Alleged relationships of View of the Hebrews to the Book of Mormon have attracted interest pe-