APOSTATE

Members of the Church vary in their levels of participation or belief (see Activity in the Church). Latter-day Saints who have seriously contravened or ignored cardinal Church teachings (publicly or privately) are considered apostates, whether or not they have officially left the Church or affiliated with another religion. By not participating in Church meetings one is not considered apostate. However, when individuals ask to have their names removed from Church records, policy requires such requests to be honored. A Church disciplinary procedure may be held for any member who violates important commandments and “will not repent” (Mosiah 26:32; D&C 42:28). Open repudiation of the Church, its leaders, and teachings is one ground for excommunication.

The steps to apostasy are usually gradual. All members are counseled to guard against all manifestations of personal apostasy (DS 3:293–312; Asay, pp. 67–68). The most frequent causes of apostasy are failure to maintain strict standards of morality, taking personal offense (real or perceived), marrying someone who is of another faith or who is irreligious, neglecting to pray and maintain spirituality, or misunderstanding of the teachings of the Church.

Apostasy may be accelerated by a faulty assumption that scripture or Church leaders are infallible. Joseph Smith taught that “a prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such” (HC 5:265). He also declared he “was but a man, and [people] must not expect me to be perfect” (HC 5:181). Neither the Church nor its leaders and members claim infallibility.

Above all, the Church affirms that its members should seek personal revelation to know the truth and live in tune with the spirit of God. Those who have not done this may drop by the wayside when their faith is challenged or when difficulties arise.

Apostates sometimes become enemies of the Church. Leaving the Church, which claims to be God’s official church, containing the fulness of the gospel, often results in feelings of guilt. While many return, others develop a need to defend their actions, “disprove” the Church, or become hostile enemies. The fruits of apostasy are generally bitter. The Book of Mormon warns of unfavorable conditions that result from transgression contrary to “light and knowledge” (Alma 9:23).

LDS scriptures establish a loving and hopeful attitude toward apostates. Latter-day Saints are strongly counseled to love those who have left the faith, and to encourage, plead, and work with those who have strayed, inviting “the lost sheep” back to the fold (Luke 15:3–7). Of the wayward, the resurrected Savior taught, “Ye shall not cast him out of your . . . places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them” (3 Ne. 18:32). The desire to return is motivated by the reality of repentance enabled by the atonement of Jesus Christ. “He who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more. By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:42–43).

[See also Anti-Mormon Publications; Schismatic Groups.]

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APOSTLE

An “apostle” is an ordained leader in the Melchizedek Priesthood in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Apostles are chosen through inspiration by the president of the Church, sustained by the general membership of the Church, and ordained by the first presidency and the quorum of the twelve apostles by the laying on of hands. They serve as general authorities—as distinguished from local and regional officers—holding their office as apostle for the duration of their lives. The senior apostle is the President of the Church.

In addition to serving as witnesses of Jesus Christ to all the world (D&C 107:23), as Jesus’ apostles did, members of the current Quorum of
the Twelve Apostles hold the keys of the priesthood—that is, the rights of presidency (D&C 107:35; cf. 124:128). Of their priesthood authority, President Brigham Young said, “The keys of the eternal Priesthood, which is after the order of the Son of God, are comprehended by being an Apostle. All the Priesthood, all the keys, all the gifts, all the endowments, and everything preparatory to entering into the presence of the Father and of the Son, are in, composed of, circumscribed by, or I might say incorporated within the circumference of, the Apostleship” (JD 1:134–35). As a priesthood quorum, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles is next in authority to the Quorum of the First Presidency (D&C 107:24). Further, it directs the domestic and international ministry of the quorums of the seventy (D&C 107:34; cf. 124:139–40), and except in the presence of a member of the First Presidency or a more senior member of the Twelve, an apostle presides wherever he may be in the Church.

In the New Testament, an apostle (from Greek apostellin, to send forth [as a representative or agent]) was a divinely chosen envoy (Mark 3:14; John 15:16; Acts 1:21–26) who was a witness to Christ’s resurrection and carried a missionary obligation to testify to it.

Jesus himself was an apostle through whom God spoke (Heb. 1:2; 3:1). The Father sent Jesus, and whoever receives him receives the one who sent him (Mark 9:37; John 8:16–19). As the Father sent him, so Jesus sent his apostles (John 20:21). Initially, they were called from those who “compared with us [the Twelve] all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us” (Acts 1:21). The number twelve, associated with the apostles, echoes the number of tribes of Israel whom the apostles are to judge (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30). In this connection, they stood as the foundation of the early Christian church (Eph. 2:19–21; 4:11–14).

At times, the term embraces more than the Twelve, as is implied both in the phrase “all the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:7)—which follows particular mention of “the twelve” by Paul (1 Cor. 15:5)—and in references to persons named as apostles who were known not to be among the Twelve (Acts 14:14; Rom. 16:7). It is probable that by A.D. 54 the Lord’s brother James had become one of the Twelve (1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19). Even so, most New Testament references to apostles refer to
members of Jesus' original Twelve or to Paul. They were the guarantors or prime witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection, which itself constituted the assurance that he was the expected Messiah and Lord of glory (Acts 1:8–11). In the first century, apostles were traveling witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection, sent by him into the world for this purpose (Acts 1:8; cf. Matt. 28:19–20). At the group’s core—and the Church's foundation—stood Peter, James, and John, who had been with or near Jesus during critical experiences, including his transfiguration (Mark 9:2–9) and his agony in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32–34).

The significance of Jesus’ twelve apostles is underscored in the Book of Mormon. First, about 600 B.C. both Lehi and his son Nephi, saw in vision the Twelve as followers of Jesus in Palestine and as victims of persecution (1 Ne. 1:10–11; 11:29, 34–36). Second, these Twelve are to judge the twelve tribes of Israel and the other twelve disciples whom the resurrected Jesus chose during his ministry in the Western Hemisphere about A.D. 34 (1 Ne. 12:9–10; Morm. 3:18–19; cf. D&C 29:12). Third, these latter twelve disciples—as distinguished from Jesus’ twelve apostles in Palestine—are to judge their own people who are descended from the house of Israel (3 Ne. 27:27). Fourth, during his visit in the Western Hemisphere, the risen Jesus established the position of the Twelve in his church when he chose and instructed them carefully in his gospel (3 Ne. 11:18–12:1; cf. 13:25–34; 15:11–16:20; 18:36–37; 27:13–21). He conferred on them authority to teach the gospel and administer its ordinances—that is, to baptize both with water and the Spirit—thus making them the transmitters of the Church’s doctrine and practices (3 Ne. 11:22; 18:36–37; 19:6–14; 26:17). Fifth, in harmony with the pattern in the New Testament, the Book of Mormon records that Jesus was sent by the Father (3 Ne. 18:27; cf. 16:3) and that he in turn commissioned those twelve disciples to “go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken” (3 Ne. 11:41).

Modern revelation adds further information. The apostolic office and authority were restored to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery by Peter, James, and John, thus underscoring the continuing significance of this office in the Church (D&C 27:12; see also Melchizedek Priesthood: Restoration Of). As early as June 1829, nearly a year before the Church was organized, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer, later joined by Martin Harris, were instructed concerning the kinds of men to be chosen as apostles and were commissioned to select the first Twelve in the modern era (D&C 18:26–38). This commission was carried out on February 14–15, 1835, when Cowdery, Whitmer, and Harris selected twelve men to be apostles and ordained the nine who were present (HC 2:186–98).

Modern scripture specifies that “every decision . . . must be by the unanimous voice” of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (D&C 107:27). Further, its members are empowered to baptize, declare the gospel, and ordain others to the priesthood (D&C 18:26–36). The Lord has instructed that the number of apostles in the Quorum of the Twelve must be maintained (D&C 118:1) and that their keys “have come down from the fathers, . . . being sent down from heaven” (D&C 112:32). Those who serve in this office are to “cleanse [their] hearts and [their] garments, lest the blood of this generation be required at [their] hands” (D&C 112:33).

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APRIL 6

April 6, 1830, is the date on which The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized. The Prophet Joseph Smith was divinely authorized to reestablish the Church of Christ on this day (see Restoration) and it may be the anniversary of the Lord’s birth on earth (D&C 20:1). The Church commemorates the importance of April 6 by scheduling its annual General Conference on or near this day.

Concerning the date of Christ’s birth, one of the earliest known references to December 25 was in the third century A.D. (Hippolytus, Commentarii in Danielem, 4.23.3). Scholarly consensus recognizes that early Christians probably appropri-