

they were born on earth. Third, those who accept and live the GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST go through a process of being born again in a spiritual sense (*see* BORN OF GOD). Although these births are real, they do not in any way constitute any type of REINCARNATION.

Men and women become conscious of their divine origin and birthright when they recognize their relationship with the Supreme Being, address him as Father, and become aware that in scripture God addresses mankind as his children (1 Jn. 3:1–2; Matt. 6:9).

In the COUNCIL IN HEAVEN, God the Father offered his spirit children the opportunity to progress toward becoming like he is by leaving his presence and being born on earth in a mortal, physical body and learning to live by faith (Abr. 3:22–28). Mortal birth is the event by which one's SPIRIT BODY is temporarily joined with a mortal tabernacle begotten by earthly parents. The exact time when the premortal spirit enters the unborn physical tabernacle is not specified in divine revelation. Through the FALL OF ADAM, and birth into mortality, mankind becomes subject to two deaths: the physical or temporal death, which is a death of the body, and the spiritual death, which is being shut out of God's presence (*see* LIFE AND DEATH; PLAN OF SALVATION).

Through the ATONEMENT of Jesus Christ all people are given opportunity to be born again in a spiritual sense as his sons and daughters so as to return to God's presence as his spiritually begotten children (Mosiah 5:7–9; Alma 5:14). The process of being born of the spirit begins when one is baptized and receives the GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST. Since the HOLY GHOST is a member of the GODHEAD, the effects of the spiritual death, or separation between man and God, is lessened individually when one is truly born of the Spirit.

Birth as spirit beings and birth as mortals have already occurred to all of mankind on the earth. The spiritual rebirth necessary for salvation in the presence of God requires considerable additional individual effort through obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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BIRTH, SPIRITUAL

See: Born of God; Premortal Life

BIRTH CONTROL

The GENERAL HANDBOOK OF INSTRUCTIONS for Church leaders has the following instructions concerning birth control: "Husbands must be considerate of their wives, who have a great responsibility not only for bearing children but also for caring for them through childhood. . . . Married couples should seek inspiration from the Lord in meeting their marital challenges and rearing their children according to the teachings of the gospel" (*General Handbook*, 11-4).

Interpretation of these general instructions is left to the AGENCY of Church members. One of the basic teachings of the Church, however, is that spirit children of God come to earth to obtain a physical body, to grow, and to be tested. In that process, adults should marry and provide temporal bodies for those spirit children. For Latter-day Saints, it is a blessing, a joy, and also an obligation to bear children and to raise a family.

One of the cornerstones of the gospel is agency or choice. Latter-day Saints believe that everyone will be held responsible for the choices they make. Many decisions involve the application of principles where precise instructions are not given in the *General Handbook of Instructions* or in the scriptures. The exercise of individual agency is therefore required, and Latter-day Saints believe that personal growth results from weighing the alternatives, studying matters carefully, counseling with appropriate Church leaders, and then seeking inspiration from the Lord before making a decision.

Church members are taught to study the question of family planning, including such important aspects as the physical and mental health of the mother and father and their capacity to provide the basic necessities of life. If, for personal reasons, a couple prayerfully decides that having another child immediately is unwise, birth control may be appropriate. Abstinence, of course, is a form of contraception. Like any other method, however, it has its side effects, some of which may be harmful to the marriage relationship.

Prophets past and present have never stipulated that bearing children was the sole function of the marriage relationship. They have taught that

physical intimacy is a strong force in expressing and strengthening the love bond in marriage, enhancing and reinforcing marital unity.

Decisions regarding the number and spacing of children are to be made by husband and wife together, in righteousness, and through empathetic communication, and with prayer for the Lord's inspiration. Latter-day Saints believe that persons are accountable not only for what they do but for why they do it. Thus, regarding family size and attendant questions, members should desire to multiply and replenish the earth as the Lord has commanded. In that process, God intends that his children use the agency that he has given them in charting a wise course for themselves and their families.

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BIRTH RATES

See: Vital Statistics

BISHOP

A bishop is the ecclesiastical leader of a Latter-day Saint congregation or WARD, and has comprehensive pastoral and administrative responsibility at that level. This differs from other Christian churches in which bishops administer large geographical areas involving a number of congregations.

The word "bishop" comes from the Greek word *episkopos*, meaning "overseer." He is the pastor or shepherd, and is charged with the care of his flock. In the apostolic period, PAUL wrote to the bishops in Philippi (Phil. 1:1), and other letters speak of the bishop's duties and of his sacred role in caring for the Church of God (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9).

The bishop's office is a complex priesthood calling. The bishop is president of the ward's AARONIC PRIESTHOOD holders and is responsible for all their activities. He is also an ordained HIGH PRIEST in the MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD and is the presiding high priest in the ward, responsible

for all ward activities and functions (D&C 107:15-17). As the common judge and the presiding high priest, he determines the worthiness of all members of his ward and directs the performance of sacred ordinances (D&C 107:68-76). He is assisted by two counselors, usually high priests, who with the bishop constitute the BISHOPRIC and share responsibility for all ward organizations. The bishop and his counselors extend calls to ward members as needed to fill the numerous assignments in the many programs of the ward, encompassing activities for ward members at all ages.

A bishop holds his official position for an indefinite time period. A new bishop is called when an existing bishop is replaced or when a new ward is organized. After prayerful deliberation, the STAKE PRESIDENCY proposes a new bishop to the FIRST PRESIDENCY and QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES. The individual nominated must be a member of the priesthood body of the ward. He does not seek nor apply for this position and no theological degree is necessary. A bishop is a lay minister and receives no monetary compensation for his services. Like other local Church officers, he must maintain himself and his family through normal employment. In selecting a bishop, a stake presidency ordinarily considers testimony, judgment, commitment, and charity toward ward members, as well as the virtues of sobriety and integrity and the administrative and teaching skills identified in the New Testament description of bishops:

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach. Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous. One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil [1 Tim. 3:2-6].

Receiving a call to be a bishop is often a powerfully spiritual experience for a man as he realizes the awesome responsibility and feels the spirit confirm the importance of the call.

The bishop is sustained by a vote of the congregation, after which he is ordained and set apart to this holy office by the laying-on of hands generally by the stake president under assignment from the First Presidency. After a bishop is released from active duty, he will often be called "bishop"