nation between welfare farms, dairies, and canneries was established, and a wider range of goods became available. The Church established central storehouses to supply regional storehouses. In the 1970s, with the maturing of the storehouse system, the Church selectively introduced local production and storehouses in areas outside the United States where need and resources warranted. The storehouse system is also available for assistance in cases of disaster (see Calamities and Disasters; Emergency Preparedness).

Presently, the entire Bishop’s Storehouse Resource System operates with efficiency and quality equal to commercial commodity activities, but maintains its spirit of volunteer service and local administration. While the bishop’s storehouse system effectively assists thousands of people every year with material necessities, its additional value lies in the character development and spiritual growth of both givers and receivers.

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BLACKS

The history of black membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be divided between the era from 1830 to June 1978 and the period since then.

HISTORY. Though few in number, blacks have been attracted to the Church since its organization. Early converts (such as Elijah Abel) joined during the 1830s; others (such as Jane Manning James) joined after the Saints moved to Illinois. Among those who came to Utah as pioneers were Green Flake, who drove Brigham Young’s wagon into the Salt Lake Valley, and Samuel Chambers, who joined in Virginia as a slave and went west after being freed. Throughout the twentieth century, small numbers of blacks continued to join the Church, such as the Sargent family of Carolina County, Virginia, who joined in 1906; Len and Mary Hope, who joined in Alabama during the 1920s; Rufin Bridgeforth, a railroad worker in Utah, converted in 1953; and Helvécio Martins, a black Brazilian businessman, baptized in 1972 (he became a General Authority in 1990). These members remained committed to their testimonies and Church activities even though during this period prior to 1978 black members could not hold the Priesthood or participate in Temple ordinances.

The reasons for these restrictions have not been revealed. Church leaders and members have explained them in different ways over time. Although several blacks were ordained to the priesthood in the 1830s, there is no evidence that Joseph Smith authorized new ordinations in the 1840s, and between 1847 and 1852 Church leaders maintained that blacks should be denied the priesthood.

Samuel D. Chambers (1831–1929) and his wife Amanda Leggroan (c. 1908). Chambers was converted in Mississippi in 1844 and came to Utah in 1870 after the Civil War. For eighty-five years he was faithful and loyal to the Church. He served joyfully and was deeply respected.
because of their lineage. According to the Book of Abraham (now part of the Pearl of Great Price), the descendants of Cain were to be denied the priesthood of God (Abr. 1:23–26). Some Latter-day Saints theorized that blacks would be restricted throughout mortality. As early as 1852, however, Brigham Young said that the “time will come when they will have the privilege of all we have the privilege of and more” (Brigham Young Papers, Church Archives, Feb. 5, 1852), and increasingly in the 1960s, Presidents of the Church taught that denial of entry to the priesthood was a current commandment of God, but would not prevent blacks from eventually possessing all eternal blessings.

Missionaries avoided proselytizing blacks, and General Authorities decided not to send missionaries to Africa, much of the Caribbean, or other regions inhabited by large populations of blacks. Before World War II, only German-speaking missionaries were sent to Brazil, where they sought out German immigrants. When government war regulations curtailed proselytizing among Germans, missionary work was expanded to include Portuguese-speaking Brazilians. Determining genealogically who was to be granted and who denied the priesthood became increasingly a sensitive and complex issue.

During the civil rights era in the United States, denial of the priesthood to blacks drew increasing criticism, culminating in athletic boycotts of Brigham Young University, threatened lawsuits, and public condemnation of the Church in the late 1960s. When questioned about the Church and blacks, Church officials stated that removal of the priesthood restriction would require revelation from God—not policy changes by men.

Recent Developments. On June 9, 1978, President Spencer W. Kimball announced the revelation that all worthy males could hold the priesthood (see Doctrine and Covenants: Declaration 2). Following this official revelation, proselytizing was expanded worldwide to include people of African descent. Between 1977 and 1987, Church membership grew from 3,969,000 to 6,440,000, an increase of 62 percent. Because LDS membership records do not identify race, it is impossible to measure accurately the growth of black membership, except in areas where people are largely or exclusively of African descent. In the Caribbean, excepting Puerto Rico, membership grew from 836 to 18,614 and in Brazil from 51,000 to 250,000 during that decade.

In other areas of Latin America, such as Colombia and Venezuela, increasing numbers of blacks also joined the Church. In Europe, blacks, including African immigrants to Portugal, joined the Church. Moreover, in Ghana, Nigeria, and throughout west and central Africa, missionary work expanded at a phenomenal rate. Excluding South Africa, where the membership was predominantly white, membership grew from 136 in 1977 to 14,347 in 1988, almost all in west Africa (see Africa, The Church in).

The LDS Afro-American Oral History Project, conducted by the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University, demonstrated the increasing number of black members in the United States. Through interviews with black Latter-day Saints throughout the country, a symposium on LDS Afro-Americans held at Brigham Young University, and responses to a mailed survey, a more reliable flow of data was generated about the thoughts, feelings, convictions, and experiences of LDS Afro-Americans. The study found that within the Church Afro-Americans experience both high acceptance and, paradoxically, cultural miscommunications. For example, in response to the survey, 81 percent felt their future as blacks in the Church was hopeful. They explained that they experienced more social interactions and more meaningful relationships with Church members of all races, especially whites. At the same time, however, 46 percent said white members were not aware of the “needs and problems of black members.” Some felt a lack of fellowship as well as economic and racial prejudice from white members.

Black Latter-day Saints are a nonhomogeneous mix of various “kindreds, tongues, and peoples” emerging from thousands of years of unprecedented religious and cultural exclusions. As with LDS Afro-Americans, many black members outside the United States encounter contrasting circumstances of full ecclesiastical involvement, on the one hand, and general Church ignorance of their respective cultures, on the other hand. Local leaders and members (primarily white Latter-day Saints) often lack a good working knowledge of black members’ needs, concerns, and circumstances. Despite the 1978 priesthood revelation
and expanded missionary work among blacks, unexplored challenges to their growth and retention remain in counterpoint to their happiness with priesthood inclusion.

Despite the cultural miscommunications that remain, black Latter-day Saints enjoy opportunities in all phases of Church activity, including missionary work, quorum leadership, bishoprics, and stake presidencies, along with other members. The first entirely black African stake was organized in 1988. Indeed, black Latter-day Saints may be an LDS historical enigma that has emerged as a prime example of success in LDS brotherhood and sisterhood.

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BLASPHEMY

Blasphemy denotes sacrilegious actions, speech, or thoughts that mock or revile God. A person blasphemes who, understanding the gravity of this behavior, willfully belittles or maligns God, the Godhead, or that which is of them, such as the commandments, covenants, ordinances, revelation, scriptures, and prophets.

Under the law of Moses, blasphemy—understood anciently to be mainly the unauthorized uttering of the ineffable name of Jehovah (YHWH)—was a heinous offense punishable by stoning (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 24:10–16). Charges of blasphemy figure twice in the Book of Mormon—in Shem’s false accusations against Jacob (Jacob 7:7) and in Korihor’s insolent speech before the chief judge (Alma 30:30). In these cases, and generally, blasphemy embraced many forms of impiety, whether directed against God, against his servants (Acts 13:45), against the king (1 Kgs. 21:10), or in some cases against holy places or things, including the law (Acts 6:13). However, when blasphemies were spoken in relative ignorance, the gift of mercy could mitigate the requirements of justice (1 Tim. 1:13).

If a person with spiritual knowledge intentionally blasphemes God or the divine, the sin is most serious. For those who have entered into the new and everlasting covenant, blasphemy in extreme form is a sin against the Holy Ghost wherein one assents anew unto the death of Christ and the shedding of his innocent blood. This is called the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost (Matt. 12:31–32; D&C 132:27).

Emphasizing the gravity of the sin of blasphemy for those who claim to be his followers, Christ revealed that when he comes to purge the world he will commence with those “who have professed to know my name and have not known me, and have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house” (D&C 112:26).