The law of chastity applies not only to behavior but also to dress, speech, and thought. Latter-day Saints are counseled to dress modestly, to use dignified language in speaking of bodily functions, and to cultivate virtuous thoughts. Accordingly, they are to avoid anything pornographic in literature, movies, television, and conversation. Though many outside the Church regard masturbation as normal, LDS leaders teach that the practice is wrong, one that feeds base appetites and may lead to other sinful conduct. Similarly, unmarried couples who engage in petting or fondling are breaking the law of chastity, and stimulating impulses that may lead to other sin.

Chastity fosters personal peace and confidence (see D&C 121:45). Referring specifically to unchastity, Alma wrote that “wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10). The Church teaches that those guilty of infidelity lose the Spirit of the Lord, and bring upon themselves and their families jealousy, grief, anger, and distrust.

Persons guilty of unchastity may receive forgiveness through full repentance. Because unchastity violates baptismal and explicit temple vows, penitent offenders must confess such sins to their bishop, branch president, or other appropriate Church leader. After prayerfully considering the transgression, the Church leader may—especially in cases of adultery, fornication, or homosexuality—convene a Disciplinary Council to help the transgressor through repentance and to protect the integrity of the Church. Depending on the offense and the spiritual maturity of the offender, a disciplinary council may excommunicate, disfellowship, place on probation, or exonerate the person.

Disciplinary councils usually require transgressors to seek forgiveness from individuals whom they have drawn into sexual sin and from spouses betrayed through infidelity. Transgressors are also to seek forgiveness from God through prayerful reformation of their lives, forsaking unchaste actions and thoughts. God promises that he will not remember the sins of those who repent fully (Isa. 1:18; D&C 58:42–43). However, recurrence of the transgression can cause the weight of the former sin to return (D&C 82:7), and more serious consequences to follow (D&C 42:26).

Living the law of chastity does not mean asceticism. Rather, it means to “bridle all [our] passions, that [we] may be filled with love” (Alma 38:12). Within marriage, physical intimacy strengthens the divinely ordained bond between husband and wife. By protecting the soul against carnality, chastity safeguards the joys of marriage in this life and exaltation in the life to come. Only the morally clean may enter the temple, where Latter-day Saints solemnly covenant to keep themselves chaste so that they may receive God’s greatest blessing, eternal life (D&C 14:7). Through receiving temple ordinances and remaining worthy, a husband and wife may reach a perfect union sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise, thus achieving a marriage that endures beyond the grave, blessed with spirit offspring in the eternities (D&C 132:19; cf. 131:1–4).

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BRUCE J. CHRISTENSEN

CHILDREN

[This entry consists of three articles:

Roles of Children
Blessing of Children
Salvation of Children

The first article explores the roles of children from their heavenly parents to their roles and activities within an earthly family. The second article relates to an ordinance within the Church usually performed a few weeks after the birth of children when they are given the names by which they shall be known on the records of the Church and normally a blessing is given at the same time. The last article discusses the innocence of children until they reach the age of accountability; that their salvation is assured until that time.]

ROLES OF CHILDREN
Latter-day Saints believe that children are Spirit sons and daughters of God who have come to earth with their own divine inheritances and identities. Parents, with the support of the Church, are responsible for nurturing the divine and righteous attributes of their children and for helping them develop love for God and fellow beings. Through
Children, like adults, express their beliefs and feelings about the gospel of Jesus Christ during monthly testimony meetings (Orem, Utah, 1982). Courtesy Floyd Holdman.

love and prayerful guidance, parents can help children learn that they have a potential for greatness and goodness, and that life on earth has purpose and eternal consequences. Parents and children can establish family bonds that may endure forever (see MARRIAGE: ETERNAL MARRIAGE).

God has commanded parents to teach their children “to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost”; they are also to “teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord” (D&C 68:25, 28).

Childhood is a period of preparation and practice in which children must learn to distinguish good from evil, so that when they reach the age of ACCOUNTABILITY and are baptized (usually at eight years), they will be ready to exercise their AGENCY wisely and assume the responsibilities of membership in the Church. Children should learn to serve God and other people, and should prepare for responsibilities they will have as adults.

The Church teaches that children learn gospel values, doctrines, and behavioral applications most effectively in the home. They learn at a very young age to pray individually and as part of the family. In many homes during FAMILY PRAYER, families kneel together while one member prays, and small children take their turn with the help of their parents. In addition to regular individual and family prayers and blessings on the food at each meal, children learn that they can pray whenever they want to express gratitude or need divine help. They can receive priesthood BLESSINGS from their fathers or home teachers when they need inspirational help or guidance.

Latter-day Saints are encouraged to help their children read and study the SCRIPTURES daily, and many do this as a family activity at a specified time each day. LDS families are also counseled to hold a FAMILY HOME EVENING once each week. All family members, including young children, can be given opportunities to conduct these meetings, prepare and present lessons, lead music, read scriptures, answer questions, offer prayers, and provide refreshments. Within this framework of support and cooperation, children take part in making decisions and solving family problems, and they learn to internalize values as they develop autonomy, initiative, and competence. LDS children also learn the gospel in less formal settings as families work, play, and eat together. These activities provide occasions to teach gospel values and create bonds of trust.

Through its programs the Church supports the parents and the home. It provides training, materials, and other adult role models for children, thereby reinforcing gospel principles taught by the family. Children participate with their families during weekly worship services called SACRAMENT MEETINGS, at which they may partake of the SACRAMENT, participate in congregational singing, and give as well as listen to gospel-related talks. During the monthly FAST AND TESTIMONY MEETING, members, including children, may bear individual TESTIMONY to the ward congregation.

PRIMARY is an organized program of religious instruction and activity in the Church for children ages eighteen months to twelve years. Its purpose is to teach children the gospel of Jesus Christ and help them learn to live it. Participating in Primary helps children prepare for BAPTISM and other ORDINANCES.

In Primary, held each Sunday, children develop skills and gain competence in communication, leadership, gospel scholarship, and social relationships through many gospel-centered activities. They offer prayers, recite scriptures, and give gospel-related talks. They sing songs written specifically for children, listen to stories, and participate in activities such as dramatizations, role plays, and games. In smaller age-grouped classes, they receive scripturally based lessons designed for their level of understanding. Primary leaders and teachers encourage the children to study and learn the ARTICLES OF FAITH. Each year the Pri-
primary children prepare a sacrament meeting presentation in which they share with the congregation the scriptural concepts they have studied.

Periodic weekday activities help children apply the gospel principles they learn on Sunday and encourage them to interact informally with their peers and leaders. The Primary sponsors quarterly activity days for all children that provide wholesome fun by involving them in physical, creative, cultural, and service activities. Ten- and eleven-year-old girls and boys participate in achievement days twice a month during which they set goals and are recognized as they learn skills in hospitality, arts and crafts, sports and physical fitness, health and personal grooming, outdoor fun and skills, service and citizenship, family skills, and safety and emergency preparedness. In some areas, boys participate in Church-sponsored scouting programs for their achievement day activities.

The Church provides resources specifically designed to teach children. Age-appropriate scripture-based lesson manuals, a children’s songbook, teaching guides, and training videos are available for leaders and teachers. The Friend, a monthly magazine written specifically for children, is available through subscription in most English-speaking countries. Excerpts are translated and compiled in International Magazines for children living in other parts of the world.

[See also Family; Fatherhood; Motherhood; Primary.]

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BLESSING OF CHILDREN

The blessing of infants is normally performed during a Fast and Testimony Meeting. The father who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood, or another bearer of that priesthood selected by the family, usually pronounces a name and blessing upon a child within a few weeks after its birth. Either may be assisted by other Melchizedek Priesthood bearers. Older children may be blessed at the time of the conversion of their family. Under special circumstances children may be blessed at home or in a hospital.

The precedent for blessing children was set by the Savior in both Palestine and the New World. Both the New Testament (Mark 10:16) and the Book of Mormon (3 Ne. 17:21) describe Jesus blessing little children. In a revelation concerning the government of the Church, the Prophet Joseph Smith received specific directions on this ordinance: “Every member of the Church of Christ having children is to bring them unto the elders before the church, who are to lay their hands upon them in the name of Jesus Christ, and bless them in his name” (D&C 20:70).

The blessing ordinance thus described is neither the infant baptism performed in many other Christian churches nor simply a christening and prayer on the child’s behalf. Instead, the priesthood bearer seeks to exercise his right to receive revelation from God in the child’s behalf. The fixed portions of the ordinance are the addressing of Heavenly Father, the invoking of the Melchizedek Priesthood authority by which the blessing is spoken, giving the child its name, and closing in the name of Jesus Christ. The giving of the name formally identifies the child on the records of the Church as part of what may become an eternal family unit.

The blessing itself is to be given as dictated by the Spirit and may contain prophecy concerning the child’s future, a statement of gifts or promises, and instruction or promises to the parents or siblings of the child.

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LOWELL BANGERTER

SALVATION OF CHILDREN

In Latter-day Saint doctrine children are to be instructed in the principles of the gospel and baptized when eight years of age (D&C 68:25–27). They are then responsible to adhere to the teachings of the Church relative to obtaining salvation. Before that time they are considered “infants” or “little children” and are not required to be baptized. They are considered “alive in Christ” and are “whole” (Moro. 8:8–12; JST, Matt. 18:10–11).

Although children, with all the rest of mankind, feel the mortal “effects” of Adam’s transgres-
sion, they (and all others) do not have any mystical stain of original sin upon them. Adults must have their own personal sins remitted by repentance and baptism (John 3:5; Acts 2:38; Moses 6:57–62), but “the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents [both Adam’s and their mortal parents] cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world” (Moses 6:54).

The prophet MORMON taught: “Listen to the words of Christ; . . . the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them. . . . It is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children” (Moro. 8:8–9). The Lord instructed Joseph SMITH that “little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten; wherefore, they cannot sin, for power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable before me” (D&C 29:46–47).

This unconditional benefit of Christ’s atonement saves all little children regardless of race, color, or nationality, for “all children are alike unto me” (Moro. 8:17). They all begin their mortal lives pure and innocent (D&C 93:38), and “little children also have eternal life” (Mosiah 15:25).

If they die while in this state of innocence and purity, they return to that God who gave them life, saved, and fit for his company. They are in a “blessed” condition, for God’s “judgment is just; and the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy” (Mosiah 3:16, 18). The Prophet Joseph Smith saw in vision “that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven” (D&C 137:10, TPJS, p. 200).

All that is said of infants and little children applies also to those who may be adults in physical body but are not accountable mentally (D&C 29:49–50).

Concepts outlined in scripture and by the prophets clearly demonstrate the marvelous uniting of the laws of justice and mercy because of the Atonement: none are eternally disadvantaged by noncompliance to gospel laws or ordinances they do not know or are not capable of understanding and thus cannot comply.

CALVIN P. RUDD

CHILDREN’S FRIEND, THE

Published by the PRIMARY, The Children’s Friend was the children’s magazine of the Church from 1902 through 1970. Reflecting its pioneer heritage,