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CHURCH IN THE WORLD

[Since it was organized with six members in Fayette, New York, in 1830, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has spread throughout the United States and to many countries of the world. The history and development of the Church in the United States are discussed in six major articles found under the heading History of the Church. The history and development of the Church outside the United States are discussed in different articles under the headings Africa; Asia, East; Asia, South and Southeast; Australia; British Isles; Canada; Europe; Hawaii; Mexico and Central America; Middle East; New Zealand; Oceania; Scandinavia; South America; and West Indies.]

GORDON C. THOMASSON

CIRCUMCISION

Circumcision (Gen. 17:9–14) was the sign of the covenant Abram made with God (Gen. 17:10), in token of which his name was changed to Abraham (Gen. 17:5; cf. Luke 1:59, 2:21). Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible indicates that the performance of circumcision on the eighth day after birth symbolized “that children are not accountable before me until they are eight years old” (JST Gen. 17:4–20; cf. D&C 68:25; 74:1–7). The rite is attested in the intertestamental period (1 Macc. 1:15, 60–61; 2 Macc. 6:10) and is still observed in Judaism and Islam. Circumcision as a necessity for salvation became a major controversy in early Christianity (Acts 10:45; 11:2, 15:1–31), since it had become associated with the law of Moses.

The Book of Mormon seems to imply the continuing practice of circumcision among its peoples from about 600 B.C. They “were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses” (e.g., Alma 30:3), apparently including the practice of circumcision. Near the end of Nephite history the Lord revealed to the prophet Mormon that “the law of circumcision is done away in me” (Moro. 8:8).

In modern times, Joseph Smith affirmed the perpetuity of the Abrahamic covenant and defended the integrity of Judaism. Today, however, if Latter-day Saint males are circumcised, it is for cleanliness and health, not religious, reasons. From the beginning of the modern Church, the emphasis has been on circumcision of heart (cf. Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Ezek. 44:9). Such a heart is taken as a sign or token of one’s covenants with Christ. This may be the understanding of “broken heart and contrite spirit” among Book of Mormon prophets (2 Ne. 2:7; 3 Ne. 12:19; Moro. 6:2) and in modern revelation (e.g., D&C 59:8).

CITY PLANNING

For Latter-day Saints, city planning began with the Prophet Joseph Smith, who emphasized the advantages of living in compact communities rather than on isolated farms. Many of his ideas were adopted in modified form in LDS settlements in Missouri, Illinois, and the Great Basin of the American West. These communities always provided opportunities for education, cooperation, fine arts, and worship.

Joseph Smith’s ideas about city planning are contained in a document known as the City of Zion plan, which he prepared in 1833. The characteristics of this Zion plan include a regular grid pattern with square blocks, wide streets (132 feet), alternating half-acre lots so that houses face alternate streets on each block, uniform brick or stone construction, homes set back 25 feet from the street, frontyard landscaping, gardens in the backyard, the location of farms outside of town, and the designation of central blocks as a site for temples, schools, and other public buildings.

Though Joseph Smith did not identify the sources behind the plan, perhaps he was influenced by the biblical pattern of Moses arranging the tribes around the tabernacle (Num. 2), as well as by towns in his own experience. Clearly his goal was to design communities that enhanced the cooperation and religious unity envisioned in the revelations about Zion.
LDS portions of Kirtland, Ohio, which was surveyed shortly after this plan was presented, followed it closely. Other cities influenced by Joseph Smith were somewhat different. The Saints at Far West, Missouri (1836–1839), surveyed their city into square blocks of four acres with only four one-acre lots on each. Four 132-feet-wide streets bounded a central square, but other streets were narrower. Nauvoo, Illinois (1839–1846), was similar to Far West, but only the two main streets were wider than 50 feet.

Immediately after the pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, President Brigham Young issued instructions for establishing Salt Lake City. His plan reflected elements of the City of Zion plan, with blocks the same size, but instead of twenty half-acre lots in each block, each contained eight lots, 1.25 acres in size. As in Joseph Smith’s plan, all streets were 132 feet wide and the houses on each block faced alternate streets, with each set 20 feet back from the sidewalk. The most important difference was that the lots were much larger. Each city lot became a minifarm with animals, barns, and gardens. The rapid influx of settlers into Salt Lake City led to the early subdivision of the large lots.

Other settlements (see colonization) followed the same general pattern as Salt Lake City, but the actual lot, block, and street sizes varied from community to community. While most communities adhered to the rigid grid pattern oriented to the cardinal directions, street widths ranged from 66 to 172 feet, block sizes from four to ten acres, and lot sizes from one-half to more than one acre. Though differing in details, Mormon towns were characterized by large lots, wide streets, and large blocks, features that still distinguish these communities of America’s Intermountain West. This expansive pattern later enhanced urbanization, providing space for four lanes of traffic and for large-scale downtown development.

The emphasis on large scale has also created a distinctive landscape in the small Mormon agricultural communities of the Intermountain West. Typically, the wide streets have only a narrow two-lane strip of pavement, flanked by twenty- to thirty-foot unimproved shoulders of weeds or gravel. Most residents of these villages use the large lots only for small gardens; barns, corrals, and outbuildings of the nineteenth century often remain as landscape relics. Where population growth has led to subdivision of the street frontage of the large lots, the center of the blocks has often remained open. The interior of these large blocks may be devoted to household gardens or simply allowed to remain vacant until land prices justify higher density apartment buildings or other uses for the space.

City planning in the Mormon culture region incorporates the experiences of the Mormons in their migration across the American frontier. Joseph Smith’s plan combined his New England village background with the rectangular blocks and lots typical of Philadelphia. Brigham Young adopted this rectangular pattern and added to it an emphasis on subsistence agriculture, which led to large blocks and lots for minifarms within the community. Joseph Smith’s requirement to build of brick or stone was paralleled by Brigham Young’s encouragement to build of adobe (unfired clay bricks). Old Mormon villages are currently domi-
nated by adobe, brick, and stone homes, and even the modern suburbs in Mormon communities have a high concentration of brick construction. The large scale of both Joseph Smith’s and Brigham Young’s visions of the ideal city and the emphasis on uniform setback, landscaping, and brick or stone construction combine to make the Mormon village a distinctive pattern of city planning in America.

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CIVIC DUTIES

Latter-day Saint teachings emphasize many aspects of civic duty, including responsible self-government; an informed, public-spirited citizenship; and obedience to law. LDS scriptures and leaders also encourage activity in organizations that build and maintain community life, making oneself available for public and military service, and avoidance of government welfare dependency. LDS teaching stresses education and a healthy lifestyle, both of which contribute to a strong citizenry (see Word of Wisdom).

In September 1968 the First Presidency urged members “to do their civic duty and to assume their responsibilities as individual citizens in seeking solutions to the problems which beset our cities and communities” (see Proclamations of First Presidency). Members are obligated to respect governmental authority. The twelfth Article of Faith states, “We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.” This commitment to good citizenship is further elucidated in scripture: “We believe that all men are bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside, while protected in their inherent and inalienable rights by the laws of such governments; and that sedition and rebellion are unbecoming every citizen thus protected” (D&C 134:5).

LDS emphasis on civic duty stems from Christian commitment to community service and individual freedom. The Constitution of the United States, which also promotes these values, was established by God through “wise men” for the “protection of all flesh” (D&C 101:77–80). Latter-day Saints are to strive to elect “honest” and “wise” leaders who will support constitutional freedoms, particularly freedom of religion (D&C 98:10). The Christian tradition of civic virtue that underlay the American founding has been documented by LDS scholars (Vetterli and Bryner). Latter-day Saints tend to take seriously their responsibility to participate in the political process. Since World War II, Utah has been the state with the highest percentage of eligible voters who do in fact vote in presidential elections (72 percent). Latter-day Saints are also strongly encouraged to be patriotic and share in the responsibility of defending their homelands through military service, if necessary, wherever they might live (“First Presidency Statement,” Church News, May 24, 1969, p. 12).

Latter-day Saint women were involved in public life long before women in other parts of the United States. They have always voted in Church congregations. The University of Deseret, founded in Salt Lake City in 1850, was the first coeducational university west of the Mississippi. H. H. Bancroft’s History of Utah reported that women voted in the provisional government before territorial status in 1850 (p. 272, San Francisco, 1890). The first documented women voters in modern times were in Salt Lake City on February 14, 1870. Mary W. Chamberlain was elected mayor of Kanab, Utah, with an all-female town board, in 1912. The first woman state senator elected in the United States (Dr. Mattie Hughes Paul Cannon, 1896) and the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate who was neither the wife nor the daughter of a politician (Paula Hawkins, Florida, 1980) were Latter-day Saints.

The Church encourages its members to make themselves available for public office, and many have responded. Latter-day Saints have served as governors of such states as California (Culbert Olson and Goodwin Knight) and Michigan (George Romney). In 1952 two Latter-day Saints were serving in the U.S. House of Representatives and two in the U.S. Senate. In 1991 there were nine LDS representatives and one nonvoting territorial delegate in the House and three Latter-day Saints in