CIVIC DUTIES

Latter-day Saint teachings emphasize many aspects of civic duty, including responsible self-government; an informed, public-spirited citizenry; 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
the Senate. There have been five LDS cabinet members (Ezra Taft Benson, Agriculture; Stewart L. Udall, Interior; George W. Romney, Housing and Urban Development; David M. Kennedy, Treasury; and Terrell H. Bell, Education). Latter-day Saints have served as both domestic and national security advisers in the Bush administration. Prior to 1952, no Latter-day Saint had served as a federal judge. Since then, eleven have been appointed to federal district courts and four to appeals courts.

Church members are encouraged to help their communities through volunteerism. The LDS Church is one of the most active sponsors of the scouting movement in the United States. Concern for the international community was evident when members fasted in 1985 and contributed nearly $11 million for Ethiopian and other famine relief and agricultural development for distribution largely through other agencies (see humanitarian service).

In times of increasing dependence on government programs and assistance, Latter-day Saints as a group consciously try to live in such a way as to reduce their burden on government. Their lifestyle, teachings, and youth programs are often cited as explanations for low rates of crime, drug abuse, alcoholism, illness, and unemployment in the areas where they live. Through these and other means, they invest in, and promote, education, moral behavior, and leadership—and with some success. For example, medical studies now document the healthiness of the Mormon lifestyle (USA Today, Dec. 6, 1989, p. 1), which presumably contributes to a stronger and less dependent citizenry. LDS social services and employment and welfare programs save governments millions of dollars annually. The predominantly LDS state of Utah regularly ranks first in the proportion of high school graduates who take advanced placement courses. Fortune magazine ranked metropolitan Salt Lake City first in the availability of intelligent, enthusiastic, and loyal workers (Oct. 22, 1990, p. 49), and Financial World ranked Utah the second best-governed state (Apr. 17, 1990, p. 31).

[See also Polities: Political Teachings; Politics: Contemporary; United States of America.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

MARK W. CANNON

CIVIL RIGHTS

Civil rights are legal guarantees designed to protect persons from arbitrary or discriminatory treatment. Common examples are those protecting freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom of assembly, the right to due process of law, the right to vote, the right to equal protection of the law, and safeguards for persons accused of crime, such as the right against self-incrimination, the right to confront one's accuser, the right to a jury trial, the right to counsel, and the right to a speedy trial. These and other rights are declared in the Constitution of the United States of America and in the constitutions of many other countries (see constitutional law). Civil rights are found in statutes as well as in constitutions and may provide, for example, detailed guarantees against public and private discrimination on the basis of such characteristics as race, gender, age, and religion. Civil rights issues arise when people disagree about the rights that are, or ought to be, guaranteed by law.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members have an obvious interest in securing their own rights. Beyond this, several strands of doctrine and belief—sometimes competing—shape the views of members and leaders regarding civil rights in general. The principle of free agency seems most compatible with a legal system guaranteeing wide latitude for individual choice and decision. With respect to religious liberties, agency is reinforced by individual and institutional interests in freedom from governmental restraint. In the United States of America, commitment to individual rights is further reinforced by allegiance to the personal liberties guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, which Latter-day Saints regard as an inspired document. On the other hand, the Church teaches its members to obey properly constituted governmental authority (D&C 134:5; 98:6; A of F 12), which may lead to accommodation and submission when core religious interests are not threatened. In addition, Church teachings on moral questions sometimes predispose members, as well as the institutional Church, to take positions on political issues (abortion, for example) that run counter to the rights claimed by others. As a result, the position of the Church and its members toward current civil rights issues is complex.

A Church statement of belief regarding government, adopted in 1835, singled out "free exer-