unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Ne. 12:17–19). Christ’s new law clearly requires that not only outward acts but also inner thoughts and feelings conform to the spirit of the law (cf. Alma 12:12–14; D&C 88:109).

In the Church today, the Lord has emphasized that his commandments include the responsibility of self-direction: “Behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves” (D&C 58:26–28). When the “law of the Church” was received in 1831 (D&C 42), this individual responsibility was also stressed: “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart” (42:22), and “Thou shalt not speak evil of thy neighbor, nor do him any harm” (42:27). Later, the Lord said, “Thou shalt not steal; neither commit adultery, nor kill, nor do anything like unto it” (D&C 59:6). It is apparent that God requires an awareness of one’s agency and in effect grants each the power to direct oneself. As one lives in accord with the commandments and thereby becomes more sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, outward observances become less important and the perfection of one’s thoughts and motives comes to occupy one’s attention.

Thus is it that Latter-day Saints find fulfillment and happiness in obedience not only to specific commandments such as the word of wisdom (D&C 89) and the law of tithing (D&C 119) but also to the counsel from inspired leaders given in Church conferences and in approved written sources, such as official Church publications.

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DIX S. COONS

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**COMMON CONSENT**

Common consent is a fundamental principle of decision making at all levels in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In selecting new officers and making administrative decisions, Church leaders are instructed to seek the will of God. Once the Lord makes his will known and a decision is reached, the matter is brought before the appropriate quorum or body of Church members, who are asked to sustain or oppose the action. This process provides for direction of the Church by revelation, while protecting the agency of the members to verify in their own minds whether decisions have been proper and made according to the will of God.

The principle of common consent has functioned in the Church since its inception, though the actual practices incorporating this principle have evolved significantly. The revelation on LDS Church government, received when it was organized in April 1830, states: “No person is to be ordained to any office in this church, where there is a regularly organized branch of the same, without the vote of that church” (D&C 20:65). This instruction was reemphasized three months later: “All things shall be done by common consent in the church” (D&C 26:2). LDS practices may have been influenced in these earliest years by the Book of Mormon model of theocratic government that conducted its “business by the voice of the people” (Mosiah 29:25–26), and by biblical example (e.g., Ex. 24:3; Num. 27:19).

Evidence from accounts of some early meetings and conferences indicates that many of the New England leaders of the Church felt that the membership should be directly involved in decision-making meetings, including making motions on policy issues, following standard parliamentary procedure for public meetings, and voting to finalize decisions. Individual members sometimes exercised the prerogative to call a meeting, and once it was in session, anyone had the right to address the group. The conduct of their meetings followed the congregational model that was familiar to them. However, before long early Latter-day Saints began to realize that having a prophet as their leader was a reality that must be recognized in decision making, and that they could not follow the traditional congregational model without denying the authority and revelations that God had bestowed on Joseph Smith, these being the essential features of the Restoration that brought them together in the Church.

An incident in September 1830, wherein Hiram Page claimed to have received revelations for the direction of the Church, brought the issue
into focus. The confusion of Oliver Cowdery and other Church members that was caused by Page’s claim to be a second revelator provided the occasion for a revelation through Joseph Smith clarifying the distinctive role of Joseph as the prophet. This revelation also indicated that “all things must be done in order, and by common consent in the church” (D&C 28:13). As the authority of Joseph Smith and his successors in the office of President of the Church was clarified over the following years by subsequent revelations (D&C 107:65–67, 91–92), the principle that the sustaining voice of the members of the Church should be sought was also repeatedly reaffirmed (D&C 38:34; 42:11; 102:9; 124:144). As priesthood councils and priesthood quorums were introduced into the Church organization, general discussion of policy issues and decision making became more their responsibility in council meetings, and less an agenda item for conferences, which in turn focused more on preaching the gospel.

Today the Church continues to operate by divine revelation and common consent. Callings to positions of Church service at all levels of the organization and ordination to the priesthood are made by the inspiration of authorized leaders and are then brought before the appropriate body of members to be sustained or opposed. Members do not nominate persons to office, but are asked to give their sustaining vote to decisions of presiding councils by raising their right hand, and anyone may give an opposing vote in the same way. This procedure is also followed in accepting important revelations and scriptural additions.

In a much less visible but equally important practice, decision makers at all levels present policy decisions and callings to priesthood councils for their comment and approval. At the local level a Bishop will ordinarily discuss decisions with his counselors in the bishopric before presenting a matter to the ward membership for a sustaining vote. On many policy and program decisions the
bishops will consult with the ward council and work for consensus in that group before taking action. Following the same pattern, the stake president consults with his counselors in the stake presidency and then with the high council. The First Presidency consults in this same way on matters of general Church policy and action in regular meetings with the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Unanimity is the ideal for all these decision processes because of the importance of unity in the Church: “If ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). The three presiding quorums over the whole Church are of equal authority within their own spheres (D&C 107:22–26), but their decisions are of “the same power or validity” only when made “by the unanimous voice” of the quorum (D&C 107:27). Many important decisions take shape over what seem like long periods because achieving unanimity is highly valued by the quorums.

Because of the emphasis on divine and prophetic leadership and because of well-established norms and values in decision-making procedures, public dissent on a proposed calling or policy is unusual. There are, however, mechanisms for accommodating dissent. Normally, if one or more members find the proposed action objectionable, the dissenting member or members are asked to meet with the presiding officer privately to make known the reason for the question or objection. After considering the objections, presiding officers are free to pursue whatever decision they believe to be right.

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ROBERT E. QUINN

COMMUNITY

For Latter-day Saints, community is an essential and eternal part of life in this world and in the world to come. From the time the Church was established (1830), its teachings have placed emphasis on principles of unity, cooperation, mutual assistance, and beautification of one’s surroundings. The community of believers envisioned by the Prophet Joseph Smith continues today, based essentially on the principles he established. Changes, however, occurred as the Church moved to the Intermountain West, where Mormon towns and cities rose, and later as the Church spread to many parts of the world. As the Church has grown, the community embodied in the ward has become a special focus of spiritual and social life among Church members, however small or isolated the congregation. Wherever Latter-day Saints find themselves, they form a community of believers based on human relationships that are expected to endure forever.

TEACHINGS OF JOSEPH SMITH AND BRIGHAM YOUNG. The advantages of village life described by Joseph Smith are an extension of life in a New England town. The Smiths brought to the frontier their New England background, emphasizing the importance of the community in providing education, mutual assistance, and political and economic organization. Joseph Smith’s ideas about the im-