shorthand and transcribed the talks for publication. Watt and others thereafter transcribed a great many conference addresses and other talks for publication in the Deseret News and also in the Journal of Discourses (Liverpool and London, 1854–1886).

The conference report for the Church’s fiftieth jubilee year (1880) was the first to be published as a separate booklet (110 pages) exclusively of general conference addresses. The next volume in that series contained the talks given at the October 1897 Semiannual General Conference (78 pages). Since 1899, the Church has published a Conference Report volume for each general conference.

CHARLES D. TATE, JR.

CONFERENCES

[This entry is composed of three articles:

Conferences
General Conference
Stake Conference

The first article explains the doctrinal concepts of holding conferences and the various types of conferences held by members of the Church. The second article focuses on the history of holding general conferences. The third article gives the background of holding stake conferences and their usual format.]

CONFERENCES

Latter-day Saints are counseled, as were the New Testament saints, to “meet together oft.” Conferences are among the most frequent types of meetings. Because the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is administered by a constantly changing core of lay leaders, teachers, and officers, there is perpetual need for instruction, inspiration, and renewal. The scriptures state: “And now, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that when ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other, that ye may know how to act and direct my church, how to act upon the points of my law and commandments, which I have given” (D&C 43:8).

The word “edify” means to enlighten, lift, or elevate spiritually. By “union of feeling,” the Prophet Joseph Smith taught the sisters of the Relief Society, “we obtain power with the heavens.” Conferences contribute to building that union. In practice, Latter-day Saints often say to each other, “If you cannot come to receive, come to give.” In conferences, as in other types of Church meetings, the “strong in the Spirit” may “take with him him that is weak” (D&C 84:106).

There are only general guidelines for conferences. For “it always has been given to the elders of my church from the beginning, and ever shall be, to conduct all meetings as they are directed and guided by the Holy Spirit” (D&C 46:2).

Specific objectives, scheduling, and activities of conferences vary according to the group being served and may vary from one conference to another of the same group. Ward conferences are held annually to bring the stake leaders, ward leaders, and ward members together in local congregations to “review the status of individuals and organizations and to plan for improvement” (General Handbook of Instruction 2-4). Stake conferences are held twice annually, and are administered by stake, regional, and general authorities. Youth, young adult, and singles conferences are held annually; typically these conferences focus on inspirational experiences and social interchange. Women’s conferences and Church women’s firesides are also held each year.

The growth of the Church has led to area and regional conferences, which may involve thousands of participants in designated geographic areas. These conferences are planned, organized, conducted, and addressed by General Authorities.

Two general conferences are held each year, one in April (designated the “annual” conference) and the other in October (designated as a “semiannual” conference). These are the most far-reaching conferences of the Church and for many years have been held in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. They provide opportunities to share the common bonds of fellowship in an environment charged with spirituality and in a setting different from the local meeting places of the Church. Prayers, music, addresses by General Authorities and others, shared expressions of faith, meeting new acquaintances, and renewal of self and commitments combine to enrich the lives of all who attend or who experience the conferences on radio or television.

The Savior petitioned: “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15). Conferences of the Church serve an import-
ant purpose in aiding the members to be shielded from the evils of worldly influence and nurtured in discipleship.

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WILLIAM ROLFE KERR

GENERAL CONFERENCE
About two months after being organized on April 6, 1830, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints held its first general conference at the Peter Whitmer home in Fayette, Seneca County, New York. At that June 9 meeting about thirty members were in attendance and other people who were anxious to learn. This commenced a vital and enduring tradition (see CELEBRATIONS). Each April and October, members of the Church throughout the world assemble in Salt Lake City, Utah, for two days of meetings called general conference. For more than a century these meetings have been held in the 7,500-seat Salt Lake Tabernacle located on Temple Square. Temple Square is virtually inseparable from the tradition of general conference and has been the site of nearly every one of them.

The April conferences of the Church are called annual conferences; those in October, semiannual conferences. Current practice includes four two-hour general sessions on Saturday and Sunday, with a special priesthood session Saturday night carried by satellite to thousands of priesthood bearers throughout the world. Prior to 1977, the conferences met for three days.

Through the years general conference has accommodated the needs of the Church in a variety of ways. In 1854 David O. McKay, President of the Church from 1951 to 1970, listed the following twentieth-century objectives:

1. to inform the membership of general conditions of the Church—including whether it is progressing or retrogressing, and of its economic, ecclesiastic, and spiritual status;
2. to commend true merit;
3. to express gratitude for divine guidance;
4. to give instruction in principles, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel;
5. to proclaim the restoration, with divine authority to administer in all the ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to declare, quoting the Apostle Peter, that there is none other name under heaven given among men than Jesus Christ whereby we may be saved (Acts 4:12);
6. to admonish and inspire to continue in greater activity [IE (Dec. 1954), p. 872].

From a historical perspective, the conferences from 1830 to 1837 were called as needed by the Prophet Joseph Smith, the first President of the Church. Those attending early conferences conducted the Church’s business, heard announcements of new REVELATIONS, and exercised the principle of COMMON CONSENT in approving leaders and doctrine.

From 1838 to 1844 the concept of a regular general conference for the Church was set firmly in place and the precedents were established for the annual and semianual conferences in April and October. Although the business of the Church was still transacted, emphasis was placed on expounding and teaching the doctrines of the Church. A significant body of doctrine was reviewed and revealed during this period.

One researcher has identified six major issues addressed in the conferences prior to 1845 that demonstrate flexibility and sensitivity to timely issues: (1) emergence and development of common consent; (2) initial experiment with a Zion concept and its temporary suspension; (3) teaching and expounding the doctrines of the Church, including new revelations; (4) institutionalizing of the conference system itself; (5) development of a temple-oriented worship, including Covenants and principles associated with the preparing of a people worthy to inherit Zion; and (6) exodus of the Church from organized society into the wilderness (Lowe, p. 398).

Clashes with tradition, tensions with neighbors of other faiths, and preparations for the westward movement all imposed adaptation on the general conferences of the Church just prior to the exodus to the Great Basin in 1847.

Conferences continued during the exodus and into the permanent settlement in Utah, although there was no general conference in October 1846, which occurred during the transition period after the Latter-day Saints had been driven from Nauvoo, Illinois, and before the first company of settlers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in July 1847.

The conferences from 1848 to 1877 considered pressing needs such as emigration from the east and foreign countries, colonization, and missionary work. Assignments to colonize and calls to serve
missions were frequently announced from the conference pulpit without prior notice. Leonard J. Arrington has characterized these conferences as "the cement which held together the Mormon Commonwealth. . . . It was through the instrumentality of the conference that church leaders were able to effect the central planning and direction of the manifold temporal and spiritual interests of their followers. It was in the conference that Latter-day Saints experienced most keenly the sense of belonging to a whole—a worshipping, building, expanding Kingdom" (p. 32).

The last two decades of the nineteenth century were troubled times for the Church because federal legislation against plural marriage brought a financial and societal crisis. General conferences reflected those concerns. From 1885 to 1887, five conferences were held outside of Salt Lake City, and many of the General Authorities were in exile.

In the twentieth century because of technology and the Church’s improving image, conference sessions began reaching beyond the Tabernacle and to peoples other than Latter-day Saints. In October 1924, KSL Radio began broadcasting conferences. Coverage was extended in 1938 to other radio stations that wished to carry all or part of the sessions. In 1949 the conference was televised by KSL Television. Satellite transmission to interested television stations and cable systems in other parts of the United States was initiated in 1975, and in 1980 the conference sessions were first carried by satellite to Church centers outside of Utah. More than 2,600 Church satellite dishes in North America now receive general conference twice each year (see satellite communication system).

Conference sessions were first translated simultaneously into other languages in 1962, and by 1990 they were being translated into twenty-nine languages. Conferences can now be heard in multiple languages on Temple Square. As a result of the worldwide broadcasting and translation of conferences, the sessions are more structured and planned than they were in earlier years. Most of the speakers are presiding authorities of the Church, although on occasion other men and women are asked to participate.

General conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues today as a vital doctrinal and social institution. It touches the lives of hundreds of thousands of Latter-day Saints worldwide. The conference sermons are printed in the Church magazines and are recorded on video tapes.

[See also Celebrations.]

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M. DALLAS BURNETT

STAKE CONFERENCE
In the revelation on Church organization and government received by the Prophet Joseph Smith in April 1830, Church members were instructed to "meet in conference once in three months, or from time to time as said conferences shall direct or appoint; and said conferences are to do whatever church business is necessary to be done at the time" (D&C 20:61–62).

Once stakes were organized, the Saints began meeting in stake conferences every three months. The practice of quarterly stake conferences continued from the mid-1800s until 1973, when the frequency was reduced to two per year. General Authorities of the Church presided at most stake conferences until the mid-1980s, when the growth in Church membership and the number of stakes made it impossible for an authority to attend each conference. In 1986, General Authorities were assigned to preside at one of the stake conferences, and the Stake President was authorized to preside at the other. In 1990 General Authorities were assigned to visit each stake for a conference only once every other year.

Stake conferences bring together members and friends who reside within the geographical boundaries of a stake. At least four sessions are held during a two-day period: (1) the first meeting is with the stake presidency and the visiting authorities, if any, to review the activity and progress of the stake during the last six months; (2) a priesthood meeting to train stake and ward priesthood leaders in Church doctrine and principles; (3) a general assembly of all adults (eighteen
years of age and over) where the presiding authority and invited stake members speak; and (4) a Sabbath general session for all stake members, including children and interested friends of the Church. The Sabbath general session features congregational hymns, specially arranged choir selections, stake business, and sermons from the presiding authority, stake leaders, and other invited speakers.

The major purposes of stake conference are: (1) sustaining general and stake officers; (2) releasing stake officers; and (3) approving ordinations to the Melchizedek Priesthood, and also enhancing the faith and testimony of the members through leadership training, music, sermons, and the fellowship of the Saints. The meetings are often considered a spiritual feast. The General Authority and stake leaders are well versed in the scriptures, are excellent teachers, and present strong witness to the divinity of Jesus Christ.

MERRILL J. BATEMAN

CONFESSION OF SINS

Confession of sins is a necessary beginning step in the process of repenting and gaining forgiveness. It is a test of true repentance: "By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them" (D&C 58:43).

The need for repentance has existed from the time of Adam. The Lord instructed Adam: "Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the Kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence" (Moses 6:57). The Bible states that "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8). There are two categories of sin, those of commission and those of omission: "All unrighteousness is sin" (1 Jn. 5:17), and "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). Except for Jesus Christ, everyone who has lived past early childhood has sinned (1 Jn. 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:21).

At least three confessions must need to be made to help the sinner repent: To the Lord, to proper ecclesiastical officers, and to the injured party. Latter-day Saint doctrine holds that all must confess their sins to the Lord, from whom alone ultimate forgiveness can come. In addition, major sins (such as adultery, fornication, robbery, embezzlement, fraud, false swearing, and comparable transgressions), which may have a bearing upon Church membership, must be confessed to ecclesiastical officers such as Bishops. Church officers are counseled to respond to confessions with confidentiality and understanding, and also to encourage members to seek the Lord's forgiveness, forsake transgression, and make restitution. Transgressors are taught to make proper reconciliation with and restitution to those they have injured. Effective confession requires a "broken heart and contrite spirit" (D&C 59:8) and a willingness to humble oneself and do all that is required for complete forgiveness.

Transgressions of lesser gravity that have offended others, such as marital or social differences, minor outbursts of anger, petty disagreements, and the like, are to be confessed to the injured party often resolving the matter without involving ecclesiastical authority. Public confession is not required unless the transgression has been against the public (D&C 42:88–89).

The Church has no set time or stated formula as to when confession takes place. Periodic interviews with ecclesiastical officers may be suitable occasions, or a special appointment can be made. Confession helps lift the burden and leads toward peace, freedom, and happiness. After warning his hearers of excruciating pain and punishments that follow unrepented sins, the Lord said: "Confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments" (D&C 19:20). Repentant persons find substantial psychological as well as spiritual strength in proper confession.

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DONG SULL CHOI

CONFIDENTIAL RECORDS

Latter-day Saints have developed a long tradition of keeping detailed records about Church activities and their own lives (see RECORD KEEPING). As is true for the working files of most private institutions, the current records of the Church are not generally available to outside researchers. Undeterred public access to everyday work files would