

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.

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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 may 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 42:88–93).

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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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