

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 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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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

disrupt the organization's work flow and impinge on the privacy of individual Church members. The current membership records of the Church maintained by the Finance and Records Department are kept confidential, as are records of voluntary FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS. The Missionary Department keeps the applications it receives from prospective missionaries confidential because they contain private information about the applicants' health and personal life. Similarly, the Personnel Department does not make employee files available.

Despite the general restriction of access to these current records, the Church allows exceptions in extraordinary cases that promise substantial benefits to mankind. For instance, Church officials have provided extensive membership data to cancer researchers and others who have established a legitimate need for such information (Lyon, pp. 129–33).

Most of the noncurrent records of the Church are stored in the Historical Department, one of the world's largest religious archival institutions. Besides housing institutional records, the department also accepts donations of personal historical materials, such as the diaries and papers of individual Church members.

The majority of the thousands of collections in the Historical Department are open and available to most members of the public. Like other major archival institutions, however, the Historical Department restricts access to some of its collections for several legal and ethical reasons. Some other materials are restricted by the terms of their donation. Some of these donor-imposed restrictions eventually expire, making the donated materials more accessible to the public.

The Historical Department restricts some materials to protect the privacy of persons mentioned in them. Experts on archival law have written that "privacy is by far the most pervasive consideration in restricting materials in archives" (Peterson and Peterson, p. 39). The Church's view of privacy embraces more than the legal principle that recognizes persons' privacy until death. "In addition," Dallin H. Oaks explained, "our belief in life after death causes us to extend this principle to respect the privacy of persons who have left mortality but live beyond the veil" (p. 65). Examples of materials restricted for privacy reasons include the records of Church disciplinary proceedings, confidential minutes of Church councils, and journals of

Church officials who record confidential information disclosed to them by Church members.

The Historical Department restricts other records because they are sacred. Examples of such records include transcripts of PATRIARCHAL BLESSINGS. Generally, researchers are given access only to their own blessing transcripts, those of their spouses, and their direct-line descendants and deceased ancestors.

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CONFIRMATION

Confirmation in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a sacred ORDINANCE essential for salvation. This ordinance follows baptism by immersion for the remission of sins and is efficacious only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and repentance. It is administered by the laying on of hands by men having AUTHORITY, one of whom performs the ordinance and blesses the candidate. By this process one becomes a member of the Church and is given the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:37–38; 19:1–7). Baptism and confirmation are administered to persons at least eight years of age, the age of ACCOUNTABILITY (D&C 68:25–27).

The scriptures attest to the administering of the ordinance of confirmation in New Testament times. When Peter and John went to Samaria and found certain disciples who had received John's baptism in water, they "laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:17; see also verses 14–22).

Confirmation may be performed only by those holding the MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD. The Book of Mormon records that Jesus "touched with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, one by one, even until he had touched them all, and spake