

its special representative had been achieved; hence, in 1990, Kennedy was released from that calling, and no replacement was named. The responsibilities of the special representative were assumed by the AREA presidencies and mission presidents.

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MARTIN B. HICKMAN

DISCERNMENT, GIFT OF

The gift of discernment consists of the spiritual quality or skill of being able to see or understand, especially that which is hidden or obscure. This ability is shared in a general way by all of God's children, but "discerning of spirits" is one of the GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT that comes, under certain circumstances, specially from God (1 Cor. 12:10; D&C 46:23). The fuller gift of discerning in all spiritual matters—to know whether their occurrence is of God or not—is given by the Lord to "such as God shall appoint and ordain to watch over the church" (D&C 46:27). To possess this gift is to receive divinely revealed understanding of opposing spirits—the spirit of God and the spirit of the DEVIL. Persons possessing such a gift also correctly perceive the right course of action (D&C 63:41).

Not only can the power of discernment distinguish good from evil (Moro. 7:12–18), the righteous from the wicked (D&C 101:95), and false spirits from divine (D&C 46:23), but its more sensitive operation can also make known even "the thoughts and intents of the heart" of other persons (Heb. 4:12; D&C 33:1). "The gift of discernment [embodies] the power to discriminate . . . between right and wrong . . . [and] arises largely out of an acute sensitivity to . . . spiritual impressions . . . to detect hidden evil, and more importantly to find the good that may be concealed. The highest type of discernment . . . uncovers [in others] . . . their better natures, the good inherent within them" (Richards, p. 371).

Every Latter-day Saint has spiritual leaders who, by virtue of their CALLINGS, are entitled to the gift of discernment to enable them to lead and counsel correctly. "The gift of discernment is essential to the leadership of the Church [of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]. I never ordain a bishop or set apart a president of a stake without invoking upon him this divine blessing, that he may read the lives and hearts of his people and call forth the best within them. The gift and power of discernment . . . [are] essential equipment for every son and daughter of God. . . . The true gift of discernment is often premonitory. A sense of danger should be heeded to be of value" (Richards, p. 371).

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LEON R. HARTSHORN

DISCIPLESHIP

Like many other Christians, Latter-day Saints believe that only the transformational discipleship of those who believe in and follow Jesus Christ leads to a fulness of joy and peace in this life and ETERNAL LIFE in the world to come. Hence, true disciples are those who make the resurrected, revealing Christ the center of their lives, as did the faithful referred to in the New Testament who sat at the feet, followed in the footsteps, mourned the death, and rejoiced in the resurrection of Christ.

"Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ"—the first principle of the GOSPEL as stated in the fourth ARTICLE OF FAITH—is the explicit foundation of discipleship. From this principle all other principles and ORDINANCES of the gospel derive their efficacy, power, and harmony.

Through his perfect earthly life and infinite atoning sacrifice, Jesus Christ became not only the model and mentor but also the Savior and Redeemer and mankind's advocate with the Father. The atonement, meaning "at-one-ment," empowered the plan whereby all men and women can eventually become like FATHER IN HEAVEN and MOTHER IN HEAVEN. Through the atonement, Christ took upon himself not only the original transgression of Adam and Eve but also the per-

sonal sins of mankind, as well as the consequences of weaknesses and mistakes—including those transmitted through the generations—that are manifested in the lives even of individuals trying to follow in his footsteps. As the savior of mankind, Jesus sets the example and lovingly makes the blessings of the atonement and personal guidance available to anyone who comes to him with a broken (teachable) heart and a contrite (repentant) spirit (3 Ne. 9:20–22; 12:19–20).

The commitment to become a disciple of Christ is an unconditional one of “heart, might, mind and strength” (D&C 4:2). It centers a person’s life on Christ, making Jesus the supreme lawgiver, the frame of reference through which all else is viewed. Christ’s influence then begins to direct a person’s words, acts, and even thoughts, enabling that individual to become a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), line upon line, precept upon precept.

While some believe that full discipleship comes about almost instantaneously, Latter-day Saints view the commitment at baptism as the beginning of a lifelong process that involves an upward spiral of learning, committing, and doing on increasingly higher planes. The heart of this process is learning to educate and obey the conscience, the repository of the Spirit of Christ given to every person (John 1:9; Moro. 7:16). As individuals obey the general commandments given through his appointed prophets, they become more attuned to hear the “still small voice” of the Holy Ghost (1 Ne. 17:45) that communicates specific personal direction and leads individuals to full discipleship.

The educated conscience, schooled by prayerful study of the scriptures, selfless service, and the making and keeping of God’s COVENANTS, becomes a growing source of intrinsic security and well-being, the basis for decision making, the essence of personal FREEDOM. “If ye continue in my word,” said Christ, “then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32). As a person begins to see more as the Lord sees, to acquire more of the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16), that individual is empowered to become independent of all other influences and to rise above childhood, genetic, and environmental tendencies.

The fruits that naturally grow out of this divine center are described as characteristics of disciples in both ancient and modern scripture. Disci-

ples receive and obey the Lord’s commandments (D&C 41:5); they are “submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon [them]” (Mosiah 3:19); they remember the poor and needy, the sick and afflicted (D&C 52:40); they act as a light to others (3 Ne. 15:12), love others as Christ loves (John 13:34–35), and are willing to forsake all to follow him (Luke 14:33) and to lay down their lives for his sake (D&C 103:28).

The role of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the process of discipleship is, as PAUL observed of the former-day Church, “for the perfecting of the saints” (Eph. 4:12), and for helping members bridge the gap between theory and practice in becoming true disciples.

While one can go to church without being active in the gospel, for Latter-day Saints it is not possible to be a full disciple of Christ without being active in his Church. The Church teaches the GOSPEL, administers its ordinances, and provides opportunities to bring both temporal and spiritual blessings to others. The Church is the KINGDOM OF GOD on earth for which the disciple prays and works while seeking to unify it with God’s kingdom in Heaven (Matt. 6:10). Gospel principles and ordinances empower the disciple of Christ, line upon line, to become even as he is.

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STEPHEN R. COVEY

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

To aid the spiritual development of its members, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has developed a system of counseling, rehabilitation, and, where needed, disciplinary action.

Members are accountable to the Lord for the way they conduct their lives, and personal worthiness is requisite for enjoying the full blessings of Church MEMBERSHIP. The judge of such worthiness is in most cases the BISHOP of the WARD, who is appointed “to be a judge in Israel” (D&C 107:72) and is “to judge his people by the testimony of the