

tures of different dispensations. CIRCUMCISION, for example, important in previous dispensations as a sign of a covenant, was not essential in later dispensations. Blood SACRIFICES required in Old Testament times to anticipate the Atonement were fulfilled in Christ, with new redemptive emblems of bread and wine being prescribed by Jesus. Latter-day Saints have a strong recognition of change and progress in sacred history. Personal growth and its implications for the development of a perfected Zion society are essential in LDS eschatology (see ETERNAL PROGRESSION). This view of progress is evidenced in the concept that the final dispensation builds upon previous ones and achieves the goals of all of them with the celestialization of the earth. The earth then will become a glorious residence for those of all dispensations who have been resurrected and perfected in Christ (D&C 88:17–26).

A definite priesthood line of authority is an essential component of the LDS understanding of dispensations. Thus, Moses and Elijah visited Peter, James, and John at the MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION to restore certain keys of authority, and as already noted, these and many other ancient prophets visited Joseph Smith to give him the same authority (see RESTORATION OF THE GOSPEL).

Although the Lord's Church in successive dispensations ceased to function on earth because of apostasy, the work of the Lord in each dispensation is open-ended, leading to the final dispensation. The Lord's work that was not completed in an earlier dispensation will continue into the final dispensation, which is appropriately called "the fulness of times." In this last dispensation, some ideals never before reached on the earth will be accomplished (i.e., GATHERING of Israel, the SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST, and the MILLENNIUM).

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COURTNEY J. LASSETTER

DISTRIBUTION CENTERS

In order to make standardized administrative and teaching materials available to its members, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has developed a system of distribution centers around the world. These distribute authorized Church literature and CURRICULUM materials to Church units, members, and officers in approximately one hundred languages. Such materials include scriptures, lesson manuals, teaching aids, handbooks, forms, reports, supplies, and video and cassette tapes.

The item in greatest demand is the Book of Mormon, with over four million copies distributed annually. Since 1989 the majority of these copies are in languages other than English. Some centers also coordinate local printing and distribution of Church magazines in their areas. Each center offers services geared to the particular proselytizing, teaching, and administrative needs of Church programs in its area. Some centers are equipped to print many of the materials they distribute, thus reducing the expense of shipping from Salt Lake City. Materials required in large quantities and hardbound books are often produced by commercial vendors. Wherever printed and regardless of language, all materials are uniform in their content.

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JOHN E. CARR

DISTRICT, DISTRICT PRESIDENT

A "district" is an ecclesiastical unit similar in function to a STAKE. Districts are found within missions in developing areas of the Church mostly outside the United States and Canada. Districts are meant to be transitional. Once membership in a district has grown to an average of 250–300 members per BRANCH, with 10 percent or more of these members holding the MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD, the district will normally be made into a stake and the qualifying branches within the district made into WARDS. Insofar as possible and practical, all

Church programs are made available to members living within districts.

Until recent years, there were more districts in the Church than stakes. But Church growth from 1965 to 1990 has changed that ratio. As of January 1, 1991, there were 1,784 stakes and 482 districts in the Church (457 of these districts were outside the United States and Canada).

A district is presided over by a district president, who must hold the Melchizedek Priesthood (either elder or high priest). The district president is nominated by the mission president, approved by the AREA PRESIDENCY, called and set apart by the mission president, and sustained by a vote at district conference or district general priesthood meeting. He serves with two counselors and generally serves with a district council of twelve Melchizedek Priesthood holders.

The word "district" is also used to describe certain other Church geographical divisions. For example, a temple district is made up of a number of stakes and/or missions whose members are encouraged to perform their TEMPLE ORDINANCES in a designated temple.

WILLIAM S. EVANS

DIVORCE

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints officially disapproves of divorce but does permit both divorce (the legal dissolution of a marriage bond) and annulment (a decree that a marriage was illegal or invalid) in civil marriages and "cancellation of sealing" in temple marriages.

Latter-day Saints believe that God intended marriage to be an eternal union when he commanded that a man and woman "shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). However, under Jewish interpretation of the LAW OF MOSES, a man had the right to divorce his wife if she found disfavor in his eyes or for "uncleanness" (adultery or other reasons). The man was required to give his wife a written bill of divorcement, which freed her to remarry (Deut. 24:1-2), although in some cases he was not allowed to "put away" his wife (Deut. 22:29).

Jesus Christ condemned divorce under most circumstances, saying, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). He explained that Moses had permitted divorce only "because of the hardness of your hearts" and because the people could not live the higher

law of eternal marriage, "but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8). To this he added, speaking in the Sermon on the Mount to those who would strive to be the light of the world and the children of God, "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16:18; Matt. 5:31-32; 3 Ne. 12:31-32).

The Doctrine and Covenants reiterates the teaching that marriage is ordained of God (D&C 49:15-16). The Church distinguishes between (1) civil marriages, which are valid for "time" (until divorce or the death of one spouse), and (2) temple marriages, or sealings, solemnized by proper ecclesiastical authority, which are binding for "time and all eternity" if the participants are obedient to the gospel (*see* MARRIAGE: ETERNAL). Legal annulments and divorces free the individuals married civilly for remarriage. Only the President of the Church can authorize a "cancellation of sealing" in temple marriages to free a worthy member to remarry in the temple. Without a cancellation of sealing, divorced members may remarry for time only (*see* SEALING: CANCELLATION OF).

For nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints, feelings about divorce were mixed. President Brigham Young did not approve of men divorcing their wives, but women were relatively free to dissolve an unhappy marriage, especially a polygamous union (*see* PLURAL MARRIAGE). Such divorces were handled in ecclesiastical COURTS because polygamous marriages were not considered legal by the government. Records of the number of divorces granted between 1847 and 1877 show a relatively high rate of divorce for polygamous marriages. This rate was high, not so much because polygamy was difficult, but because LDS society had not developed clear rules and expectations for the practice or the participants (Campbell and Campbell, p. 22).

Early Utah laws reflected general LDS beliefs and may have influenced the incidence of divorce. An 1851 territorial divorce law had lenient residency requirements and allowed divorce when it was clear "that the parties cannot live in peace and union together, and that their welfare requires a separation" (First Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah, 1851, p. 83).

Current Church statistics on divorces among Latter-day Saints show somewhat fewer divorces among U.S. Mormons than among the general U.S. population. Data from a 1981 Church mem-