

Sacramental Faithfulness

Guidelines for Receiving People
From The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter- day Saints

by E. Brian and Jennifer L. Hare-Diggs
Edited by Gayle C. Felton



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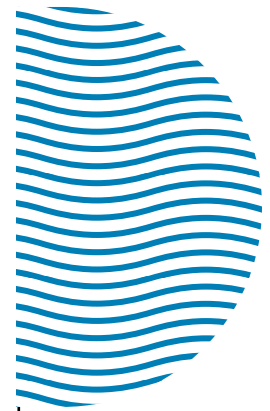
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A. Introductory Statement

In February of 1998, the General Board of Discipleship and the Utah-Wyoming Subdistrict of the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference sponsored a conference in Salt Lake City to discuss baptismal theology and practice in The United Methodist Church and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (In most subsequent references, the name of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be abbreviated LDS due to the length of the name. No disrespect is meant by this abbreviation.) An official representative and member of the Quorum of Seventy of the LDS participated. This conference arose out of a perceived need on the part of United Methodists, especially those living and ministering in the western United States, for more clarity on the issues surrounding the reception of converts from the LDS tradition into the membership of The United Methodist Church. More specifically, what action should United Methodist pastors take when an LDS person seeks to become a member of The United Methodist Church? Must that person receive Christian baptism, or does his or her baptism in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints constitute a valid Christian baptism?

Participants in the conference all recognized that these questions are complicated by issues of difference between the two traditions regarding the doctrines of God; salvation; and the meaning, purpose, and role of baptism itself. Also a factor in consideration were the positions of other churches of the historic, apostolic Christian tradition, and our existing ecumenical relationships with such churches. Consensus emerged that The United Methodist Church is in significant need of a clear and consistent official position on this matter. This paper has been written by the Reverends E. Brian and Jennifer L. Hare-Diggs and edited by Dr. Gayle C. Felton to present the results of that conference to the church and make recommendations toward an official denominational position.

Other Christian traditions have earlier undertaken a similar task, and their work can be useful to United Methodism. On the Protestant side, both the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Southern Baptist Convention have engaged in research and reflection on the questions at hand. Both have produced official church positions with clear guidelines governing their relationship and ministry to people of the LDS tradition. The work of these two Protestant churches led them to similar conclusions. Because The United Methodist Church has more in common with the Presbyterian Church on matters of sacramental—specifically baptismal—theology, the Presbyterian Church’s process and conclusion are more relevant. There are three major sections in this paper, the last beginning quite near the end. They are “The Presbyterian Example,” “Key Theological Issues,” and “Conclusions and Recommendations.”



B. The Presbyterian Example

The Presbyterian document reads as follows:

- a. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a new and emerging religion that expresses allegiance to Jesus Christ in terms used within the Christian tradition. It is not, however, within the historic apostolic tradition of the Christian Church of which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a part.
- b. Persons of Mormon background intending to profess faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and become an active member of a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall receive Christian baptism as administered by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) or another church recognized as being within the historic apostolic tradition.¹

The conclusion of the Presbyterian Church that people coming from the LDS tradition must receive a Christian baptism is based on the prior conclusion that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints constitutes a religious tradition that is clearly other than the historic Christian faith. Thus, the Presbyterian Church reasons, a baptism from within a religious community that is other than Christian simply cannot serve as a Christian baptism.

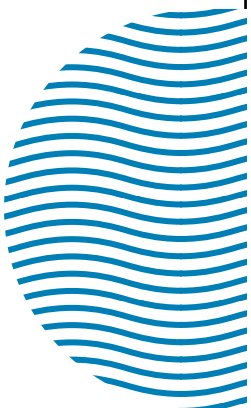
The reasoning that led the Presbyterian Church to its conclusions highlights the theological differences between the LDS church and the Presbyterian Church as a part of the historic, apostolic Christian tradition. These same points are at issue between the LDS church and The United Methodist Church as a part of that same tradition.

C. Key Theological Issues

I. Scriptural and Doctrinal Authorities

The most readily identifiable difference between the two traditions is that of sacred and authoritative Scriptures. Of course, for United Methodists and other Protestant churches, there is only one collection of authoritative Scriptures—the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, which together constitute our Holy Bible. While the LDS honors these texts as authoritative, it does not uphold them as the exclusive canon of the church. The scriptural canon within the LDS church officially includes three other documents: *The Pearl of Great Price*, *The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, and *The Book of Mormon*.

The issue of canon is foundational to establishing the differences between the two traditions, since church doctrine develops from the understanding and interpretation of Scripture. In the LDS tradition the three other sacred texts influence the interpretation of the Bible and therefore the formation of doctrine. Within The United Methodist Church, church doctrine stems from Scripture as interpreted by tradition, experience, and



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reason, subject to the basic boundaries already established by the church's historic and ecumenical creeds. Section 1 of "Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task," ¶ 60 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996*, begins:

United Methodists profess the historic Christian faith in God, incarnate in Jesus Christ for our salvation and ever at work in human history in the Holy Spirit. . . .

Our forebears in the faith reaffirmed the ancient Christian message as found in the apostolic witness even as they applied it anew in their own circumstances.

Their preaching and teaching were grounded in Scripture, informed by Christian tradition, enlivened in experience, and tested by reason. . . .

United Methodists share a common heritage with Christians of every age and nation. This heritage is grounded in the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, which is the source and measure of all valid Christian teaching.

Faced with diverse interpretations of the apostolic message, leaders of the early church sought to specify the core of Christian belief in order to ensure the soundness of Christian teaching.

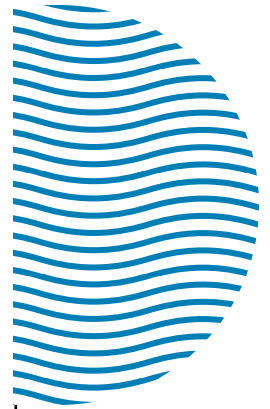
The determination of the canon of Christian Scripture and the adoption of ecumenical creeds such as the formulations of Nicaea and Chalcedon were of central importance to this consensual process. Such creeds helped preserve the integrity of the church's witness, set boundaries for acceptable Christian doctrine, and proclaimed the basic elements of the enduring Christian message. These statements of faith, along with the Apostles' Creed, contain the most prominent features of our ecumenical heritage. . . .

The basic measure of authenticity in doctrinal standards, whether formally established or received by tradition, has been their fidelity to the apostolic faith grounded in Scripture and evidenced in the life of the church through the centuries.²

The LDS church clearly rejects the creeds that The United Methodist Church uses to interpret the Bible. This rejection of the historic creeds of the church is actually foundational to the establishment of the LDS religion. According to LDS Scripture, when the religion's founder Joseph Smith struggled in his day with the differences among the many Christian denominations he encountered (including the Methodist tradition), he prayed to God for guidance in this matter. Immediately, Smith received what he understood to be a vision:

When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*

My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong)—and which I should join.



I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight.³

These radically differing foundations result in some radically differing doctrine on such matters of belief as the nature and being of God; the nature, origin, and purpose of Jesus Christ; and the nature and way of salvation. The statements of faith in Nicaea and Chalcedon, along with the Apostles' Creed, are held by The United Methodist Church to "contain the most prominent features of our ecumenical heritage."⁴ They will function as standards for reflection on the possibility of ecumenical relationship with the LDS church.

2. The Nature of God

The first article of "The Articles of Religion of The Methodist Church" states:

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.⁵

The Nicene Creed states:

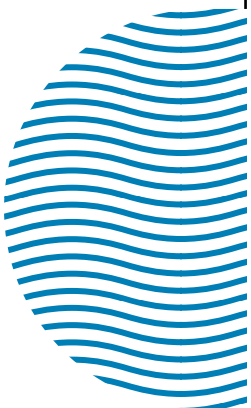
We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made. . . .

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
is worshiped and glorified.⁶

In quite clear contrast, *The Doctrine and Covenants* of the LDS church states, "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit."⁷ Joseph Smith himself wrote in more detail on this matter:

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible,—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man. . . . It is the first principle of



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the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did; and I will show it from the Bible.⁸

Not only was God the Father once a human being, but he was and still is clearly male gendered and married to a heavenly mother of clear female gender. The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* states:

Latter-day Saints infer from authoritative sources of scripture and modern prophecy that there is a Heavenly Mother as well as a Heavenly Father. . . . A Heavenly Mother shares parenthood with the Heavenly Father. This concept leads Latter-day Saints to believe that she is like him in glory, perfection, compassion, wisdom, and holiness.⁹

At another point, this encyclopedia reads:

The Father, Elohim, is called the Father because he is the literal father of the spirits of mortals (Heb. 12:9). This paternity is not allegorical. All individual human spirits were begotten (not created from nothing or made) by the Father in a premortal state, where they lived and were nurtured by Heavenly Parents. These spirit children of the Father come to earth to receive mortal bodies; there is a literal family relationship among humankind.¹⁰

Such belief regarding a gendered, married, and procreating god is at the core of LDS doctrine of God and makes claims about the essential nature of God that are in sharp contrast to the doctrinal statements of United Methodism.

3. The Nature, Origin, and Work of Jesus Christ

Basic Christological differences exist between the two traditions. Article II of “The Articles of Religion of The Methodist Church” states:

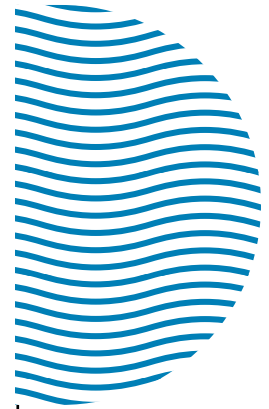
The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men.¹¹

Article II of “The Confession of Faith of The Evangelical United Brethren Church” states:

We believe in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, in whom the divine and human natures are perfectly and inseparably united. He is the eternal Word made flesh, the only begotten Son of the Father, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹²

Both doctrinal statements echo the Nicene Creed, which asserts that Jesus Christ is

the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,



God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.

It goes on to state

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.¹³

These statements of faith differ significantly from LDS doctrine on several important points. Most notably, the Jesus of the LDS tradition is not co-eternal with the Father and “of one substance with the Father.” On the contrary, he is thought to be begotten of the Father (and Heavenly Mother) as are all pre-mortal spirits:

Fundamental to the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the concept that all human beings were born as spirit sons and daughters of heavenly parents before any were born as mortals to earthly parents.¹⁴

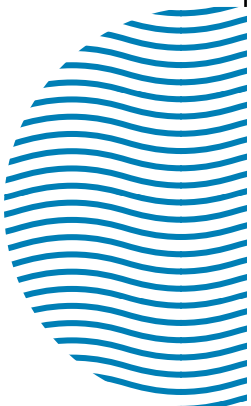
What makes Jesus unique as regards his pre-mortal existence is not that he was begotten of the Father (though not eternally begotten), but that he was the first begotten:

Latter-day Saints believe that the eldest and firstborn spirit child of God is Jehovah and that it was he who was later born with a physical body to Mary as Jesus Christ. That is, Jehovah of the Old Testament became Jesus Christ of the New Testament when he was born into mortality.¹⁵

Begotten of two heavenly parents, as were all subsequent spirit children, this Jehovah of the LDS tradition constitutes an entirely separate and distinct being from the Father. He is neither eternal (in the sense of having no beginning and no end) nor “of one substance with the Father.” He was not even “true God” at this point in time, for he was as we all were in our pre-mortal existence. Jehovah, then, was first a spirit child and later became a mortal as he, like all spirit children, was born in bodily form. Here again, however, Jesus was unique. While all other spirits were born to two mortal parents, Jesus was born to Mary and the Heavenly Father, who quite literally fathered Jehovah again, this time in the flesh, enabling him to be born as Jesus Christ. Recent Prophet and President of the LDS church Ezra Taft Benson stated:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which He performed His mission in the flesh was sired by that same Holy Being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was He begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the Son of the Eternal Father!¹⁶

Of course, these convictions stand in clear opposition to the creeds of the apostolic Christian tradition and to the doctrinal standards of The



United Methodist Church. The Jesus of Nazareth whom we worship was and is the preexistent Word of God and was “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.”¹⁷ And while there appears in LDS theology to be a closer relationship between the Father and Jesus Christ than between the Father and other spirit children, these convictions regarding the origin of the Son and his relationship to the Father clearly call into question the nature of the unity of the Godhead as it has been understood by The United Methodist Church and the historic, apostolic Christian tradition. The LDS church even suggests the existence of three separate deities sharing a unity in will, authority, and sentiment only:

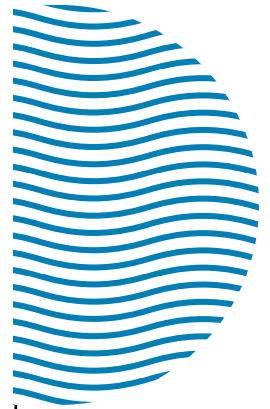
Latter-day Saints believe in God the Father; his Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost (A of F 1). These three Gods form the Godhead, which holds the keys of power over the universe. Each member of the Godhead is an independent personage, separate and distinct from the other two, the three being in perfect unity and harmony with each other (*AF*, chap. 2).¹⁸

Elder Jay Jensen has offered further clarity on the LDS position regarding the unity of the three personages; he states that they are “not united in substance” (as in the traditional *homoousious*) but instead are united only in “love, will, focus, and effort.”¹⁹ Such belief cannot be said to constitute a monotheistic theology; it more closely resembles a tritheistic or possibly a polytheistic faith.

4. Creation and the Way of Salvation

The Nicene Creed proclaims that one God is the “maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.” The creeds contain not only our faith regarding the nature of God but also our faith regarding the natures of things eternal and things created. According to this faith, God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is eternal, having no beginning and no end. The second person of the Trinity, the Son, shares these elements with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. The Son is the only Son of God and is begotten, not made. Everything else is created—made. Human beings are not understood to be children of God as the Son of God is (the Son is Son by virtue of his begottenness). In other words, human beings are not begotten of the Father but are, rather, created by the eternal and triune God. Human beings are not of the same order as God or as the Son who is God. There is a very clear distinction between the human and the divine.

The good news of Christ is that, “For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.” One who is eternally God cannot cease being God. The second person of the Trinity, however, at one point also became truly human. It is only in this Jesus Christ of Nazareth that God shares the same nature as do human beings; this human nature was assumed by God and not eternally essential to God.



According to the historic, apostolic Christian faith, humanity is in need of this good news as they, who were created good by God, have fallen from grace by their own free will and are in need of the redemption that only God through Jesus Christ can offer. “The Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church” states, “We believe man is fallen from righteousness and, apart from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, is destitute of holiness and inclined to evil.”²⁰ According to “The Articles of Religion of The Methodist Church,” we are granted salvation only by the grace of Christ who “suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men.”²¹ Our salvation is initiated by Christ and extended to humanity for acceptance and participation.

Through this process of salvation, in which we are made to be partakers of the divine nature, we ultimately share eternal life with Christ. This eternal life depends upon our relationship with Christ, who makes it possible for and allows us to share in the divine life. We ourselves do not become independently eternal or divine.

The LDS understanding of the nature of salvation diverges radically. According to the LDS, human beings are literally the children of the Heavenly Father (and Mother) in their pre-mortal, spiritual form, as was Jesus. Their spirits are begotten of the Father, not created. This makes them of the same order of existence as God:

Gods and humans represent a single divine lineage, the same species of being, although they and he are at different stages of progress. This doctrine is stated concisely in a well-known couplet by President Lorenzo Snow: “As man now is, God once was: as God now is, man may be.” . . . Thus, the Father became the Father at some time before “the beginning” as humans know it, by experiencing a mortality similar to that experienced on earth. . . . The important points of the doctrine for Latter-day Saints are that Gods and humans are the same species of being, but at different stages of development in a divine continuum, and that the Heavenly Father and Mother are the heavenly pattern, model, and example of what mortals can become through obedience to the gospel.²²

These theological claims identify the end or goal of salvation as the achievement of godhood. The way of salvation is following the model set by those who have already attained that status. They leave ambiguous the precise salvific role, if any, of the already existing gods.²³ They do, however, make it clear that according to LDS theology, there are already in existence the three gods of the Godhead and a god who presumably presided over the mortality of the Father. There will be more gods to come, as at least some of those at an earlier stage of the “divine continuum” will become gods, as did the Father. Thus by traditional Christian definition, the LDS faith is polytheistic, and the role of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is decidedly compromised.



5. The Meaning and Role of Baptism

Not surprisingly, the understandings of baptism in the two churches differ as well. United Methodists recognize that baptism is, first and foremost, about God's action, what God does for us. Baptism is a sacrament and means of God's grace. The 1996 General Conference adopted as an official interpretive statement *By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism*, which states:

Sacraments are effective means of God's presence mediated through the created world. God becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ is the supreme instance of this kind of divine action. Wesley viewed the sacraments as crucial means of grace and affirmed the Anglican teaching "that a sacrament is 'an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same.'" Combining words, actions, and physical elements, sacraments are sign-acts which both express and convey God's grace and love.²⁴

By Water and the Spirit explains the benefits of baptism. Regarding entrance into the household of faith, the document reads, "Wesley identified baptism as the initiatory sacrament by which we enter into the covenant with God and are admitted as members of Christ's Church."²⁵ This covenant is one that God initiates with us, announced in the Baptismal Covenant with the words, "The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ."²⁶ Our entrance into this household of faith through the covenant of baptism is often likened to adoption. "While Jesus' relation to God as Son is unique, for Christians, baptism means that God has also chosen us as daughters and sons, and knows us intimately as a parent."²⁷ The liturgy acknowledges that this covenant initiated by God and made between God and the person baptized also extends, by God's grace, to the whole people of God, who receive their new brother or sister by vowing to nurture and uphold him or her in the faith.²⁸

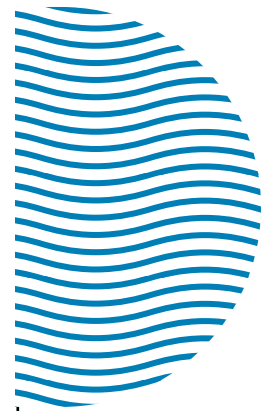
Regarding baptism as an act of repentance and inner cleansing from sin, *By Water and the Spirit* reads:

In baptism God offers and we accept the forgiveness of our sin (Acts 2:38). With the pardoning of sin which has separated us from God, we are justified—freed from the guilt and penalty of sin and restored to right relationship with God. This reconciliation is made possible through the atonement of Christ and made real in our lives by the work of the Holy Spirit. We respond by confessing and repenting of our sin, and affirming our faith that Jesus Christ has accomplished all that is necessary for our salvation.²⁹

This document upholds the historic Christian belief that the pardoning of sin in baptism is a pardoning both of our actual sins and of our original sin, the "inherent inclination toward evil"³⁰ with which we are born.

By Water and the Spirit addresses baptism as a new birth and a mark of Christian discipleship by stating:

Baptism is the sacramental sign of new life through and in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Variouslly identified as regeneration, new birth, and being



born again, this work of grace makes us into new spiritual creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17). We die to our old nature which was dominated by sin and enter into the very life of Christ who transforms us. Baptism is the means of entry into new life in Christ (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). . . . New birth into life in Christ, which is signified by baptism, is the beginning of that process of growth in grace and holiness through which God brings us into closer relationship with Jesus Christ, and shapes our lives increasingly into conformity with the divine will.³¹

Here again is a heavy emphasis on God's action in baptism, on grace that elicits our response. We can die to the old self to begin a new life with Christ because Christ died for us. Baptism is the mark of our calling to holy living, and our holy living is a response to the work that God has initiated and made possible in our lives.

Because of the emphasis in our United Methodist theology on the primacy of God's action in the sacrament of baptism and on the need of all human beings to be cleansed and saved by the grace of God, *By Water and the Spirit* declares that people of all ages may be baptized:

The sacrament is a powerful expression of the reality that all persons come before God as no more than helpless infants, unable to do anything to save ourselves, dependent upon the grace of our loving God. The faithful covenant community of the church serves as a means of grace for those whose lives are impacted by its ministry. Through the church, God claims infants as well as adults to be participants in the gracious covenant of which baptism is the sign. . . .

The church affirms that children being born into the brokenness of the world should receive the cleansing and renewing forgiveness of God no less than adults. The saving grace made available through Christ's atonement is the only hope of salvation for persons of any age. In baptism infants enter into a new life in Christ as children of God and members of the body of Christ.³²

Out of this same understanding of the primacy of God's action in baptism, the document insists that "the sacrament is to be received by an individual only once. . . . The claim that baptism is unrepeatable rests on the steadfast faithfulness of God."³³

Whereas in the United Methodist tradition and the broader Christian tradition, baptism as a sacrament is, first and foremost, about what God does for us, in the LDS tradition, baptism as an ordinance is, first and foremost, about human acceptance of God's plan. God is understood to act in an LDS baptism, but God acts to forgive sins in response to human worthiness.

Elder Jay Jensen outlined five purposes of LDS baptism; a discussion of the first two will be helpful here. The first purpose he cited as "Our commitment ' . . . to take upon [us] the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end' (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 20:37); . . . Baptism is an outward act showing our inward commitment to Jesus Christ."³⁴ This reads in sharp contrast to Wesley's view of the sacraments as crucial means of grace and to the church's teaching that "a sacrament is 'an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same.'"³⁵ The second purpose of LDS baptism as stated by Jensen is, "For a remission of sins."³⁶ While this



remission of sins, according to the LDS elder, certainly stems from Christ's atoning sacrifice, it seems to come only as a response to human worthiness prior to baptism. Jensen relates that, prior to the baptism of his children, they were "interviewed by a local leader, who verified their readiness, willingness, and worthiness"³⁷ for the ordinance.

The LDS church rejects the historic Christian belief in original sin and, therefore, the belief that baptism serves to cleanse one of it. This is seen in Jensen's discussion of infant baptism. He states, "Little children and the mentally impaired are not accountable and do not need to be baptized. . . . 'No one having faith in the word of God can look upon the child as culpably wicked; such an innocent being needs no initiation into the fold, for he has never strayed therefrom; he needs no remission of sins for he has committed no sin.'"³⁸ In the LDS tradition, children begin to need the remission of sins at age eight, when they are understood to become accountable for their conduct.

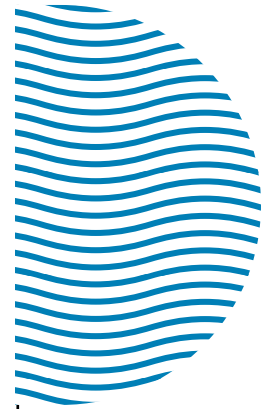
While not as integral to the differences between LDS and United Methodist understandings of baptism, the next three purposes as outlined by Elder Jensen are of interest:

3. As a prerequisite to receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost.
4. To qualify for entrance into the kingdom of God.
5. To become a member of the Church.³⁹

The actual reception of the gift of the Holy Ghost is referred to as confirmation and is considered a separate ordinance. LDS baptism is not considered a baptism by water and the Spirit but by water alone, with the work of the Holy Ghost occurring in confirmation. The fourth and fifth purposes of baptism are telling. One may not enter the kingdom of God without receiving an LDS baptism, that is, without being a member of the LDS church. LDS baptism is understood to admit one to membership not in any universal church but into the one true church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While such an exclusive understanding of baptism within the LDS tradition may be objectionable, The United Methodist Church does accept baptisms from other traditions that hold their own baptism to be the only true and valid form of the sacrament (for example, some Orthodox communions and some Baptist and Pentecostal fellowships). Such exclusiveness alone is not sufficient grounds to draw a definitive conclusion of the broader question at hand.

Crucial to the issue of whether or not The United Methodist Church should accept LDS baptism as valid Christian baptism is the issue of necessary rites and due administration. United Methodist baptisms are performed in accordance with the historic, apostolic Christian tradition:

Water is administered in the name of the triune God (specified in the ritual as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) by an authorized person, and the Holy Spirit is invoked with the laying on of hands in the presence of the congregation. Water provides the central symbolism for baptism.⁴⁰



Baptism within the LDS church appears to meet these qualifications: a member of the ordained, Aaronic priesthood enters a body of water with the candidate and states, before immersing the individual in the presence of the congregation, “Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”⁴¹ Complicating the question of validity, however, are two fundamental issues. The first is that of baptism in the name of the triune God. It is true that the LDS uses the historic Trinitarian formula, but the intent or meaning of those words varies greatly from traditional use. Are those words simply a legalistic formula, or do they, for the historic church, contain a profession of faith in and a reliance upon the specific (nature of) God whom these words signify and name?

The second issue complicating the question of the validity of LDS baptism is that of the “authorized person” described as administrator of the sacrament within our own tradition. What is meant by “authorized person”? Certainly the denomination does not mean ordained or appointed within United Methodism, as we accept baptisms by other Christian denominations and churches. Does it, then, mean authorized by other Christian churches in whatever way they may officially authorize those who are commissioned to administer baptism? If this is what is meant, the question recurs: Is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a Christian church? However, even if The United Methodist Church were to claim a clear answer to this latter question, as do the Presbyterians and the Southern Baptists, the question of the recognition of LDS baptism still might not be solved. A deeper and more extensive discussion of issues of sacramentality is needed.

D. Conclusions and Recommendations

There is great need for serious theological discernment regarding the relationship of The United Methodist Church to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This process requires understanding of the classical Christian and Wesleyan heritage, especially as related to the theology and practice of baptism. The adoption of *By Water and the Spirit* as an official interpretive resource on baptism provides the denomination with guidance in this area. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, by self-definition, does not fit within the bounds of the historic, apostolic tradition of Christian faith. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the LDS church itself, while calling itself Christian, explicitly professes a distinction and separateness from the ecumenical community and is intentional about clarifying significant differences in doctrine.⁴² As United Methodists we agree with their assessment that the LDS church is not a part of the historic, apostolic tradition of the Christian faith.



Guidelines for Receiving People From the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

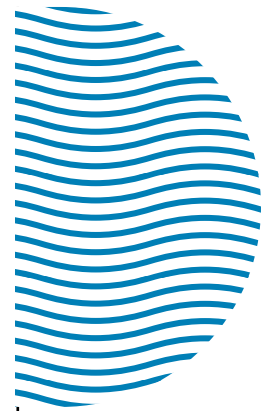
Nevertheless, while our denomination must continue to seek further clarity on issues of our own faith, we have enough clarity to take steps toward establishing a policy for The United Methodist Church regarding the reception of those converting from the LDS church. It is our recommendation that following a period of catechesis (a time of intensive exploration and instruction in the Christian faith), such a convert should receive the sacrament of Christian baptism. British Methodist systematic and liturgical theologian Geoffrey Wainwright comments:

The . . . mention of an intention “to do what the Church does” makes an important point. If an impersonal automatism of the rite is to be avoided, both the minister and the recipient must be presumed to hold a Christian intention . . . Ecumenical recognition of baptism acknowledges that other communities than one’s own have a sufficient doctrinal and practical grasp of Christianity for them to be considered essentially Christian.⁴³

John Wesley was deeply wary of any interpretation of the sacraments that might appear to limit divine freedom. God has promised to act in and through the sacraments when they are faithfully used, but this does not mean that God must act in response to human performance. And we now have *By Water and the Spirit’s* strong statement that “baptism is fulfilled only when the believer and the church are wholly conformed to the image of Christ.”⁴⁴ While this statement does not suggest that baptism is not effective or valid when the believer or the church falls short of perfect conformity to Christ’s image, it does affirm that this must always be our aim. As the body of this paper makes clear, the LDS understanding of the image of Christ and the goal of conformity to it differs radically and intentionally from the historic, apostolic tradition of Christian faith. When the LDS church baptizes, its intention is to do other than what the historic church does in baptism, and its approach is to a divinity distinctly other than the triune God of Christian Scripture and tradition.

Two other details are important to this recommendation. First, until a former member of the LDS church requests that he or she be removed from the membership rolls of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the person seeking Christian baptism will likely remain a member on LDS church records. Transfer of membership is clearly not an option for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or for The United Methodist Church. It is strongly recommended that prior to Christian initiation, the person seeking membership in The United Methodist Church be urged to initiate his or her formal removal from LDS membership rolls.

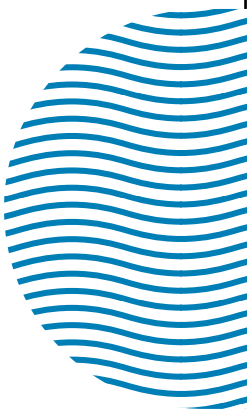
Second is the issue of the intensive period of catechesis prior to baptism recommended above. Not only is The United Methodist Church in great need of an official and thorough adult catechetical process for inquirers to the Christian faith from all types of religious or non-religious backgrounds,⁴⁵ it would do well to formulate a supplement to such a



Sacramental Faithfulness

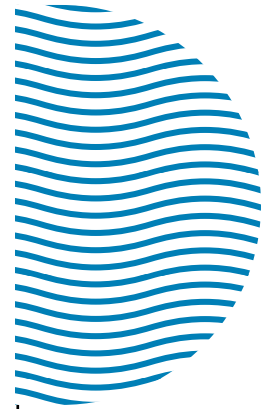
resource for inquirers specifically from the LDS tradition, because of the unique and confusing nature of such a conversion.

As we conclude this report and these recommendations, it is our prayer that United Methodism will rise to the obvious calling at hand that we faithfully lead those coming from an LDS background to the Christ they seek through The United Methodist Church.

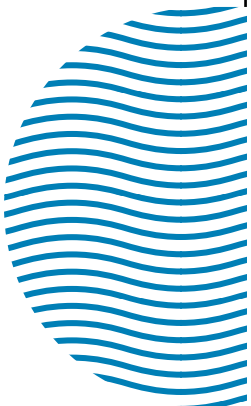


Endnotes

- 1 From *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, 1995, Part I (Office of the General Assembly, 1995); page 64.
- 2 From *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996*. Copyright © 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission; ¶ 60, pages 39–41.
- 3 From *The Book of Mormon/The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints/The Pearl of Great Price* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981); Joseph Smith—History 1:17–19; page 49.
- 4 From *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996*. Copyright © 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission; ¶ 60, page 40.
- 5 From *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996*. Copyright © 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission; ¶ 62, page 57.
- 6 From the Nicene Creed, as quoted in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989); page 880. English translation by the International Consultation on English Texts.
- 7 From *Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22, in *The Book of Mormon/The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints/The Pearl of Great Price* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).
- 8 From *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, edited by Joseph Fielding Smith, pages 345–346, Deseret Book Company.
- 9 From *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow, Vol. 2; Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992. Copyright The Gale Group. Reprinted by permission of The Gale Group; page 961.
- 10 From *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow, Vol. 2; Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992. Copyright The Gale Group. Reprinted by permission of The Gale Group; page 549.
- 11 From *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996*. Copyright © 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission; ¶ 62, page 57.
- 12 From *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996*. Copyright © 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission; ¶ 62, page 64.
- 13 From the Nicene Creed, as quoted in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989); page 880. English translation by the International Consultation on English Texts.
- 14 From *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow, Vol. 2; Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992. Copyright The Gale Group. Reprinted by permission of The Gale Group; page 728.
- 15 From *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow, Vol. 2; Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992. Copyright The Gale Group. Reprinted by permission of The Gale Group; page 728.
- 16 From *Come Unto Christ*, by Ezra Taft Benson (Deseret Book Company, 1983); Used by permission; Photocopies prohibited by law; page 4.
- 17 From the Apostles' Creed, as quoted in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989); page 881. See also Luke 1:35 and Matthew 1:20.
- 18 From *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow, Vol. 2; Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992. Copyright The Gale Group. Reprinted by permission of The Gale Group; page 552.

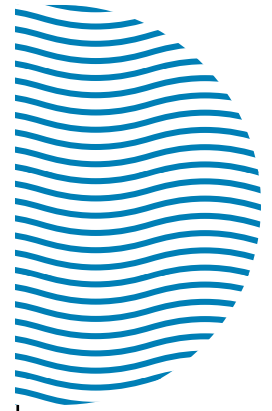


- 19 From Elder Jay Jensen of The Quorum of Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, December 9, 1998. Used by permission.
- 20 From *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996*. Copyright © 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission; ¶ 62, Article VII, page 66.
- 21 From *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996*. Copyright © 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission; ¶ 62, Article II, page 57.
- 22 From *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow, Vol. 2; Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992. Copyright The Gale Group. Reprinted by permission of The Gale Group; page 549.
- 23 Elder Jensen, in his gracious editorial notes on this paper (April 21, 1999), would have us note that in LDS theology, the salvific role of those who have achieved the status of godhood is “likened to parents who are solicitous for the eternal well-being of their children.”
- 24 From *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry*, by Gayle C. Felton (Discipleship Resources, 1997, revised 1998); pages 12–13. Internal quotation from Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace,” by John Wesley. *Sacramental Faithfulness* quotes from the study edition of *By Water and the Spirit*, which contains the full text of *By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism*. References hereafter are to this study edition. The full text of *By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism* can also be found in *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church—1996* (The United Methodist Publishing House, 1996); pages 716–735.
- 25 From *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry*, by Gayle C. Felton (Discipleship Resources, 1997, revised 1998); page 13.
- 26 From “The Baptismal Covenant I,” in *The United Methodist Hymnal*; © 1976, 1980, 1985, 1989 The United Methodist Publishing House; used by permission; page 37.
- 27 From “A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism,” brochure, by Mark C. Trotter (Abingdon Press, 1998). See also Romans 8:14–17.
- 28 See *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992); page 89.
- 29 From *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry*, by Gayle C. Felton (Discipleship Resources, 1997, revised 1998); page 22.
- 30 From *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry*, by Gayle C. Felton (Discipleship Resources, 1997, revised 1998); page 9. For more on original sin, see *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996* (The United Methodist Publishing House, 1996); ¶ 62, page 59, Article VII.
- 31 From *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry*, by Gayle C. Felton (Discipleship Resources, 1997, revised 1998); page 23.
- 32 From *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry*, by Gayle C. Felton (Discipleship Resources, 1997, revised 1998); pages 28–29.
- 33 From *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry*, by Gayle C. Felton (Discipleship Resources, 1997, revised 1998); pages 30–31.
- 34 From “Baptism and the LDS Tradition: A Presentation Given to the United Methodist Seminar,” presented by Elder Jay Jensen at First United Methodist Church, Salt Lake City, Utah, February 20, 1998; pages 4–5. Internal quotation from *Doctrine and Covenants* 20:37, in *The Book of Mormon/The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints/The Pearl of Great Price* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).



Guidelines for Receiving People From the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

- 35 From Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace,” by John Wesley.
- 36 From “Baptism and the LDS Tradition: A Presentation Given to the United Methodist Seminar,” presented by Elder Jay Jensen at First United Methodist Church, Salt Lake City, Utah, February 20, 1998; page 5.
- 37 From “Baptism and the LDS Tradition: A Presentation Given to the United Methodist Seminar,” presented by Elder Jay Jensen at First United Methodist Church, Salt Lake City, Utah, February 20, 1998; page 4.
- 38 From “Baptism and the LDS Tradition: A Presentation Given to the United Methodist Seminar,” presented by Elder Jay Jensen at First United Methodist Church, Salt Lake City, Utah, February 20, 1998; page 11. Internal quotation from *A Study of the Articles of Faith*, by James E. Talmage (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982); page 125.
- 39 From “Baptism and the LDS Tradition: A Presentation Given to the United Methodist Seminar,” presented by Elder Jay Jensen at First United Methodist Church, Salt Lake City, Utah, February 20, 1998; page 5.
- 40 From *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry*, by Gayle C. Felton (Discipleship Resources, 1997, revised 1998); page 19.
- 41 From *Doctrine and Covenants* 20:73, in *The Book of Mormon/The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints/The Pearl of Great Price* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).
- 42 “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints did not grow out of the Catholics, and it is not a Protestant church. The church I represent is the restored Church of Jesus Christ—revealed to the earth by heavenly messengers through Joseph Smith in 1830 consisting of prophets and apostles and a fullness of light and truth. We believe in a revealed religion. Revelation came to Joseph Smith and his successors.” From “Baptism and the LDS Tradition: A Presentation Given to the United Methodist Seminar,” presented by Elder Jay Jensen at First United Methodist Church, Salt Lake City, Utah, February 20, 1998; page 1.
- 43 From *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life*, by Geoffrey Wainwright; pages 126–127. Electronic rights: Copyright 1980 Epworth Press. Used by permission of Methodist Publishing House, 20 Ivatt Way, Peterborough PE3 7PG, England. Print rights: Copyright 1980 by Geoffrey Wainwright. Used by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.
- 44 From *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry*, by Gayle C. Felton (Discipleship Resources, 1997, revised 1998); page 24.
- 45 See *Come to the Waters*, by Daniel T. Benedict, Jr. (Discipleship Resources, 1996); pages 97–121.



**Petition Number: 30419-DI-NonDis-O
General Board of Discipleship
Receive guidelines for ministering to Mormons
who seek to become UM**

Whereas, there is an expressed need on the part of United Methodists for more clarity on the issues surrounding the reception of people baptized in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who seek to become members of The United Methodist Church; and

Whereas, there are varying practices in United Methodist churches in such instances, some not recognizing the Latter-day Saints' baptism, and so baptizing them; and some recognizing the baptism, and so receiving them as baptized Christians; and

Whereas, United Methodists seek to act in ways that are faithful, compassionate, and just in relationship to other faith traditions, extending hospitality toward all and charity toward those whose faith and practice differ from ours;

Therefore, while our denomination must continue to seek further clarity on issues of our own faith, we have enough clarity to take steps toward establishing a policy for The United Methodist Church regarding the reception of those converting from the LDS church. It is our recommendation that following a period of catechesis (a time of intensive exploration and instruction in the Christian faith), such a convert should receive the sacrament of Christian baptism.

We, further, petition the 2000 General Conference to receive *Sacramental Faithfulness: Guidelines for Receiving People From The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)* (found on pages 215 to 223 of the Advance Edition of *The Daily Christian Advocate*, Volume 1, Section 1), with the [incorporated] changes, as a study resource and guideline for pastors and congregations who face the challenge of receiving former Mormons who seek to become United Methodist; and

We also petition the 2000 General Conference to authorize the General Board of Discipleship to provide resources in accordance with *Sacramental Faithfulness: Guidelines for Receiving People From The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)* to the church to guide pastors and congregations to receive former Latter-day Saints (Mormons) who seek to become United Methodists in ways that are faithful to our United Methodist heritage.

[This petition was accepted by the 2000 General Conference as a consent calendar item.]

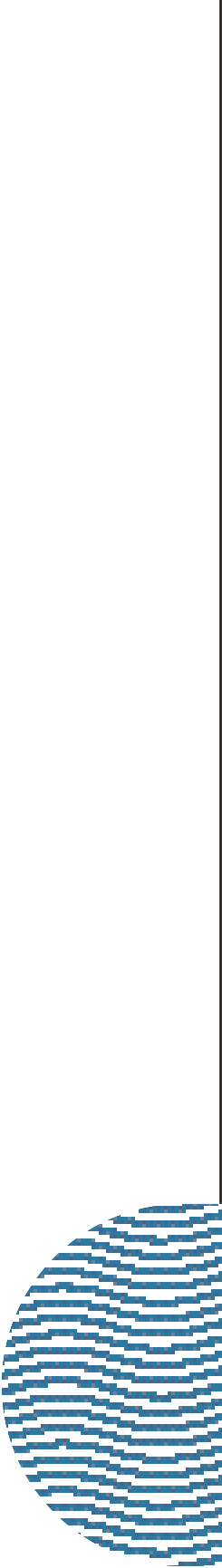


Study Guide for

Sacramental Faithfulness

Guidelines for Receiving People
From The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter- day Saints

By Gayle C. Felton



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STUDY GUIDE FOR SACRAMENTAL FAITHFULNESS: Guidelines for Receiving People From The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Copyright © 2002 the General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church. All rights reserved.

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For more information, contact Dan Benedict, P.O. Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37203-0003; phone (toll free) 1-877-899-2780, ext. 7072, or 615-340-7072, e-mail dbenedict@gbod.org.

Session 1 — Introduction and Overview

It has been said that one does not really know one's own language until one learns another language as well. In the same way, one understands one's own theology better when another is examined and compared with it. A study of *Sacramental Faithfulness: Guidelines for Receiving People from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, which analyzes significant aspects of the theology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, can be an opportunity for United Methodists to appreciate more fully our own theological positions.

Read the Introductory Statement for *Sacramental Faithfulness: Guidelines for Receiving People from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*.

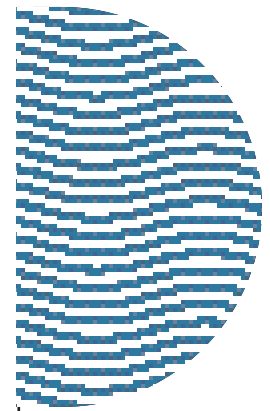
The impetus for this undertaking was the experience of United Methodist pastors ministering in Utah and contiguous states. But the questions considered here are not limited to those geographical areas. The LDS Church exists in all sections of the United States and in most other nations. It is presently the fifth largest denomination in this country — surpassed only by the Southern Baptist Convention, The United Methodist Church, the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., and the Church of God in Christ. Its worldwide membership exceeds ten million, and it is one of the most rapidly growing religious groups, both here and abroad. The questions faced by pastors in the western United States are increasingly being encountered throughout the connection.

What experience do you have with members of the LDS Church?

Many new LDS temples are being built and the public is invited to visit prior to dedication. Numbers of people are being introduced to the LDS through these visits. One in North Carolina in 1999 drew 31,000 people. A 16-page advertising supplement was placed in every newspaper in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Is there one near you? In what other ways is LDS growth being promoted in your area?

What do you know about the beliefs and practices of the LDS Church?

The questions being considered in this document may be posed as simply "Should LDS persons who want to become United Methodists be baptized in The United Methodist Church?" The underlying question is actually, "Is the LDS Church a Christian church?" Throughout its history, with few exceptions, The United Methodist Church (and the predecessor



denominations that now make it up) has accepted baptisms administered in other Christian churches as valid and has received people coming from those churches into membership without baptizing them. Should people coming from the LDS Church be treated the same or different?

What do United Methodists believe about baptism?

What does it mean to be a Christian church? What are the criteria by which a religious group can be judged as Christian or non-Christian?

Session 2 — Is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Within the Christian Tradition?

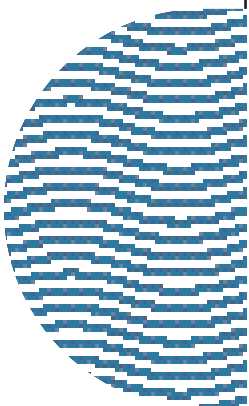
Part 1 — Understandings of God and Jesus Christ

Read "The Presbyterian Example" in *Sacramental Faithfulness*.

Are you surprised to learn that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) – as well as the Roman Catholic Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, and others—says that the LDS is not a Christian church and that people coming from it are to be baptized? Why or why not?

Read Key Theological Issues: 1. Scriptural and Doctrinal Authorities in *Sacramental Faithfulness*.

The canon of a religious group is the body of writings that it accepts as sacred scripture. The LDS Church considers the Old and New Testaments to be canonical. However, other documents are also accepted as sacred scripture. *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* is understood to be divinely inspired and equal to the Bible in authority. This book purports to be the historical record of a race of people who lived in America prior to the coming of Columbus. They were descendants of the sixth-century Jews who had been forced from their Palestinian homeland. After his Resurrection, Jesus Christ visited and revealed himself to them. This story was lost for many centuries until, in the 1820's, young Joseph Smith in upstate New York was miraculously allowed to see and translate the golden plates upon which this account was recorded. *Doctrine and Covenants* is a compilation of revelations from God given to Smith and leaders who were his successors. *The Pearl of Great Price* is composed of selected revelations, translations, and writings from Smith.



Read an account (easily found in any history of religion in the United States) of the appearance of the angel Moroni to Joseph Smith, the translation of the golden plates, and the subsequent events that were the beginning of the LDS Church.

Examine a copy of *The Book of Mormon*, noticing its content and style.

Read Key Theological Issues: 2. The Nature of God in *Sacramental Faithfulness*.

Understanding of the being and nature of God is foundational to any religion. The LDS faith conceives of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but clearly views these three as separate entities –united in purpose, but not in being. God the Father has a physical male body, is married to a female, and actively procreates spirit children who come to earth and receive physical bodies. God was once a human man living on the earth—not as Jesus Christ, but as God the Father. Now he is exalted into heaven and married to an exalted woman. Emphasis is upon the similarity of God and human beings; God is simply further along in the process through which all people are to advance.

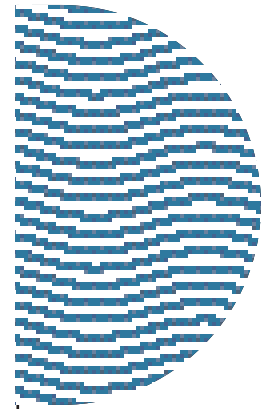
God communicates with human beings through the President of the Church, who is a prophet and speaks for God. Christ is pictured as ordaining his disciples, and LDS leadership claims authority as the only authentic successors of that ordination. Divine revelation is ongoing. For example, in 1978 the President received a revelation that black men were to be permitted to join the priesthood, which had previously been open only to white males. (Virtually all LDS men are priests, either of the order of Melchizedek or the order of Aaron. Women are not permitted to be priests.)

What is appealing about the LDS view of God? What are some of the dangers of such an understanding? How does it differ from the traditional Christian understanding?

What are some of the effects of the emphasis upon God as being married and as continually procreating offspring? What are the implications for the lives of human beings?

Read Key Theological Issues: 3. The Nature, Origin, and Work of Jesus Christ in *Sacramental Faithfulness*.

Although the LDS Church makes continual references to Jesus Christ, the church has a unique understanding of his identity. Jehovah (one of the Old Testament names for God) was the first spirit child of God. Later, Jehovah was born into the world in a physical body as Jesus. Although



remission of sins is said to come through Jesus, there is little interest in either his death or his Resurrection. Evidence of this may be noted in the striking absence of the cross in LDS iconography. Temples and meeting houses have many paintings of Jesus, but few, if any, crosses.

Make two columns in which you list:

1. The understanding of Christ's nature, origin, and work in historic Christian belief

2. The understanding of Christ's nature, origin, and work in LDS theology.

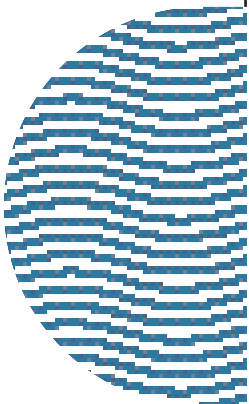
What similarities do you see? What differences? What is significant about these points of difference?

Session 3–Is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints within the Christian Tradition?

Part 2–Understandings of Human Beings and Salvation

Read Key Theological Issues: 4. Creation and the Way of Salvation in *Sacramental Faithfulness*.

In the LDS faith, human beings are spirit children of the heavenly Father and Mother who have come to earth and who received physical bodies. The purpose of earthly life is to gain experience and to prove themselves worthy to return to heaven. There is no sense of original sin or of the innate human tendency to make selfish choices rather than to follow the divine will. Because there is little concern for sin, there is little interest in the divine gift of reconciliation and new life. Emphasis, instead, is on obedience. In this hierarchical system, obedience is primarily to the church leadership. In the patriarchal arrangement of the family, obedience is to the male head of the household. The understanding of achieving salvation is one of works-righteousness, rather than dependence upon divine grace.



How does the LDS understanding of human nature compare with the traditional Christian understanding, as expressed in the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith of United Methodism? Look at the material on pages 61 and 68-69 in the 2000 *Book of Discipline*.

The LDS Church is an American-born religious movement and some aspects of its theology are quite compatible with some typical American attitudes. What examples of this compatibility do you see? Why is the LDS understanding so appealing to many people today?

The LDS faith teaches that the goal of human existence is to become gods. Every human couple can and should go through the same process as did the heavenly Father and Mother and to attain the status of godhood.

Consider the meaning and implications of the couplet by President Lorenzo Snow that is quoted in *Sacramental Faithfulness*.

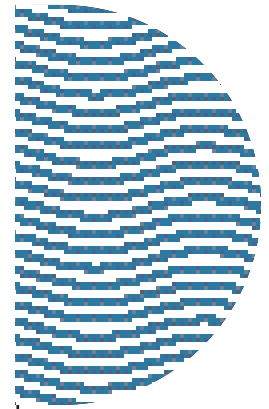
Marriage is considered to be essential to the divine plan for human lives, and faithful LDS couples are sealed in marriage for eternity. The procreation of children is one of the main ways through which a couple progresses toward divinity.

What are the implications of the LDS emphasis upon marriage and parenthood, especially for women? At what point does honoring the family become a form of idolatry?

Read Key Theological Issues: 5. The Meaning and Role of Baptism in Sacramental Faithfulness.

The adoption by the 1996 General Conference of *By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism* as an official interpretive document enables the church to examine the positions of the LDS Church in comparison and contrast to those of United Methodism.

Read and reflect as thoroughly as possible on *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry*, available through Discipleship Resources and Cokesbury. (This could ideally, but not necessarily, be a separate multi-session study.) This resource is a study version containing commentary and teaching helps. (The document without commentary can be found on pages 798-817 of 2000 *The Book of Resolutions* and on the worship web site) Using



this resource and the material in this document, formulate a summary statement of what United Methodists believe about baptism.

In the LDS Church, infants are blessed a few weeks after birth. At age eight, children are baptized by immersion. People of any age being baptized are to have faith, repentance, humility, desire, and worthiness for baptism, understanding and preparation for it, and moral accountability. Baptism is essential for salvation. Because Latter-Day Saints believe that God has not authorized leaders in other churches, baptisms outside of the LDS Church are unacceptable.

Since it emphasizes the qualities of the person who is receiving baptism rather than the action of God, LDS baptism is a form of believer's baptism. It is an ordinance—an act performed in obedience, rather than a sacrament—a means of divine grace. What are the similarities and the differences in the LDS and United Methodist understandings and practices of baptism?

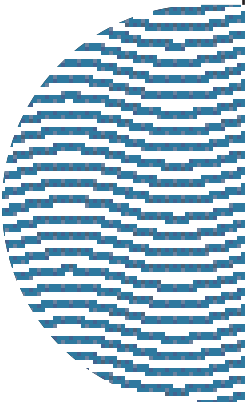
Read Petition Number: 30419-DI-NonDis-O, which the General Board of Discipleship submitted to General Conference and which was revised and approved by the General Conference in 2000. Consider different areas and possibilities where it could be examined. The current Roman Catholic position can be found in Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) Part Two.

Read Conclusions and Recommendations in *Sacramental Faithfulness*.

Sacramental Faithfulness concludes that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is not a Christian Church. Therefore, people from the LDS Church who seek to become members of The United Methodist Church have not received Christian baptism and should be baptized when they are received.

At the conference described in the introduction to this document, the first words of LDS Elder Jay Jensen's presentation were, "My fellow Christians . . ." What are the implications of United Methodism's rejection of the LDS Church's identification of itself as Christian?

The quotation from Geoffrey Wainwright originally referred to Roman Catholic baptism. As it is used here, it articulates the fundamental criteria upon which decisions of this kind must be made.



The . . . mention of an intention "to do what the Church does" makes an important point. If an impersonal automatism of the rite is to be avoided, both the minister and the recipient must be presumed to hold a Christian intention . . . Ecumenical recognition of baptism acknowledges that other communities than one's own have a sufficient doctrinal and practical grasp of Christianity for them to be considered essentially Christian.⁴³

In the light of this document, consider what is "a sufficient doctrinal and practical grasp of Christianity for [a church] to be considered essentially Christian." Examine the question, not only in evaluating the LDS Church, but focusing on The United Methodist Church as well.

Approval of *Sacramental Faithfulness* and its enabling petition by General Conference 2000 encourages study of these issues and the development of denominational resources to aid in that study. The General Board of Discipleship seeks your help in accomplishing this. Please send suggestions to:

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