# Priesthood and Mental Health: Principles of Doctrinal Inclusion

## Doctrinal Foundations

### The Principle of Heart vs. External Appearance

The doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints clearly establishes that "the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). This fundamental principle indicates that spiritual dignity is measured by righteousness of intentions and moral character, not by external circumstances or health needs.

### Precedents of Inclusion

The Church has consistently established that medical conditions, physical disabilities, or health circumstances do not affect priesthood dignity. This includes:

* Members who require medical devices
* People with neurological or psychiatric conditions (including Tourette Syndrome, autism, ADHD)
* Individuals with specific personal care needs
* Those who require medication for mental health
* People with neurological differences that require specific self-regulation mechanisms

## Harmony with "The Family: A Proclamation to the World"

The Family Proclamation explicitly recognizes that "disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation." This doctrinal statement establishes the precedent for understanding that mental health needs requiring uncommon emotional regulation procedures fall within the framework of "other circumstances" that justify individual adaptation.

## Principles of Priesthood Dignity

### Established Doctrinal Criteria

Church manuals establish that priesthood dignity is based on:

1. **Moral and spiritual righteousness**
2. **Obedience to commandments**
3. **Testimony of Jesus Christ**
4. **Desire to serve**

**Notably absent**: Any reference to specific configurations of mental health or emotional self-regulation needs.

### Differentiation Between Moral and Medical

Church doctrine makes a clear distinction between:

* **Deliberate moral choices** that affect dignity
* **Medical or psychological needs** that require adaptation and understanding

This differentiation is fundamental to understanding how mental health conditions relate to religious participation.

## Framework of Healing Principles

### The Atonement and Mental Health Conditions

The doctrine of the atonement explicitly includes healing of "sicknesses" and "infirmities" (Isaiah 53:4; Alma 7:11-12). This encompasses:

* Psychological trauma and its lasting effects
* Emotional regulation needs developed as adaptive response
* Neurological conditions like Tourette Syndrome that require specific self-regulation mechanisms
* Healing processes that may require unconventional methods such as the use of:
  + Specific clothing items
  + Medical or therapeutic devices
  + Bandages or support products
  + Diapers or other personal care accessories

Any other elements not mentioned here necessary for emotional or neurological regulation

* Inherent neurological differences that need adaptation and understanding

### Savior's Precedent

Scriptural accounts demonstrate that Christ consistently healed without judging the circumstances that led to the person's condition. His approach was healing and inclusion, not judgment of adaptations necessary for well-being.

## Practical Application in Leadership

### For Priesthood Leaders

Local leaders should:

1. Distinguish between morality and mental health
2. Consult with professionals when appropriate
3. Focus on the individual's general dignity
4. Provide compassionate support
5. Make necessary adaptations according to circumstances

### Evaluation Criteria

When considering priesthood dignity, leaders should evaluate:

✅ General moral righteousness

✅ Commitment to the Gospel

✅ Desire to serve and bless others

✅ Testimony of Christ

**NOT evaluate:**

❌ Specific mental health needs

❌ Methods of emotional self-regulation

❌ Adaptations required by trauma or circumstances

❌ Neurological differences like Tourette Syndrome

❌ Involuntary movements or necessary regulatory behaviors

## Benefits of Doctrinal Understanding

### For Individuals

Greater inclusion in church participation

Reduction of stigma associated with mental health needs

Strengthening of testimony through acceptance

Ability to serve according to spiritual gifts

### For the Community

Demonstration of Christian love in action

Testimony of principles of charity and inclusion

Strengthening of the concept that "all are alike unto God" (2 Nephi 26:33)

Model of understanding for other special needs

Creation of truly inclusive spaces for neurodivergent individuals

Testimony of acceptance toward neurological differences like Tourette Syndrome

## Guidance for Families

### Family Understanding

Families can support members with mental health needs through:

1. **Education about trauma, neuroplasticity and neurological conditions**
2. **Separation between moral and medical/neurological considerations**
3. **Individual adaptation and adaptation of other family members according to their age**
4. **Focus on mutual spiritual growth**
5. **Seeking professional understanding when necessary**
6. **Understanding that conditions like Tourette Syndrome require acceptance, not correction**

### Strengthening Relationships

These experiences can strengthen family bonds by:

* Developing greater empathy and understanding
* Deepening commitment to mutual support
* Demonstrating unconditional love in action
* Creating opportunities for joint spiritual growth

## Doctrinal Conclusion

The doctrinal principles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints completely support the inclusion of individuals with mental health and neurological needs, including those who require uncommon emotional regulation procedures or have conditions like Tourette Syndrome.

These needs:

* **DO NOT** constitute moral transgressions
* **DO NOT** affect priesthood dignity
* **DO** deserve understanding and support
* **CAN** coexist with full spiritual life
* **DO** represent legitimate neurological diversity that requires acceptance

The implementation of these principles strengthens both individuals and the community, demonstrating the highest ideals of Christian love and divine inclusion toward all human diversity, including neurological differences.

## Doctrinal References

* **D&C 121:36-46** - Principles of priesthood
* **1 Samuel 16:7** - God looks on the heart
* **2 Nephi 26:33** - Equality before God
* **Isaiah 53:4** - Christ bore our sicknesses
* **Alma 7:11-12** - The atonement includes infirmities and sicknesses
* **"The Family: A Proclamation to the World"** - Principle of individual adaptation
* **President Gordon B. Hinckley taught: "Our conduct in public should be above reproach; our conduct in private is even more important; it must measure up to the standard established by the Lord"** cited in Liahona, July 2002
* **Elder Adrián Ochoa, Liahona, October 2013, "Physical and Emotional Health"** "Taking care of your body also blesses your mind and helps you remember that you are a son or daughter of God, to have confidence in yourself and feel happy. Our emotional, physical and spiritual nature are connected"