

= Mormons =

Mormons (/ ˈmɔːrmɒnz /) are a religious and cultural group related to Mormonism , the principal branch of the Latter Day Saint movement of Restorationist Christianity , which began with Joseph Smith in upstate New York during the 1820s . After Smith 's death in 1844 , the Mormons followed Brigham Young to what would become the Utah Territory . Today , most Mormons are understood to be members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter -@- day Saints (LDS Church) . Some Mormons are also either independent or non -@- practicing . The center of Mormon cultural influence is in Utah , and North America has more Mormons than any other continent , though the majority of Mormons live outside the United States .

Mormons have developed a strong sense of communality that stems from their doctrine and history . During the 19th century , Mormon converts tended to gather to a central geographic location , and between 1852 and 1890 a minority of Mormons openly practiced plural marriage , a form of religious polygamy . Mormons dedicate large amounts of time and resources to serving in their church , and many young Mormons choose to serve a full -@- time proselytizing mission . Mormons have a health code which eschews alcoholic beverages , tobacco , coffee , tea , and other addictive substances . They tend to be very family -@- oriented , and have strong connections across generations and with extended family , reflective of their belief that families can be sealed together beyond death . Mormons also have a strict law of chastity , requiring abstention from sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage and fidelity within marriage .

Mormons self -@- identify as Christian , although some non -@- Mormons dispute this and some of their beliefs differ from mainstream Christianity . Mormons believe in the Bible , as well as other books of scripture , such as the Book of Mormon . They have a unique view of cosmology , and believe that all people are spirit -@- children of God . Mormons believe that returning to God requires following the example of Jesus Christ , and accepting his atonement through ordinances such as baptism . They believe that Christ 's church was restored through Joseph Smith and is guided by living prophets and apostles . Central to Mormon faith is the belief that God speaks to his children and answers their prayers .

Due to their high birth and conversion rates , the Mormon population has grown significantly in recent decades rising from around three million in 1970 to over 15 million in 2015 .

= Terminology =

The word " Mormons " most often refers to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter -@- day Saints (LDS Church) because of their belief in the Book of Mormon , though members often refer to themselves as Latter -@- day Saints or sometimes just Saints . The term " Mormons " has been embraced by most adherents of Mormonism , most notably Mormon fundamentalists , while other Latter Day Saint denominations , such as the Community of Christ , have rejected it . Both LDS Church members (or " Latter -@- day Saints ") and members of fundamentalist groups commonly use the word " Mormon " in reference to themselves . The LDS Church , however , disagrees with this self -@- characterization , and encourages the use of the word " Mormon " only in reference to LDS Church members . Church leaders also encourage members to use the church 's full name to emphasize its focus on Jesus Christ .

The word " Mormon " is often associated with polygamy (or plural marriage) , which was a distinguishing practice of many early Mormons ; however it was renounced by the LDS Church in 1890 and discontinued over the next 15 years . Today , polygamy is practiced within Mormonism only by people that have broken with the LDS Church .

= History =

The history of the Mormons has shaped them into a people with a strong sense of unity and communality . From the start , Mormons have tried to establish what they call " Zion " , a utopian society of the righteous . Mormon history can be divided into three broad time periods : (1) the

early history during the lifetime of Joseph Smith , (2) a " pioneer era " under the leadership of Brigham Young and his successors , and (3) a modern era beginning around the turn of the 20th century . In the first period , Smith had tried literally to build a city called Zion , in which converts could gather . During the pioneer era , Zion became a " landscape of villages " in Utah . In modern times , Zion is still an ideal , though Mormons gather together in their individual congregations rather than a central geographic location .

= = = Beginnings = = =

Mormons trace their origins to the visions that Joseph Smith reported having in the early 1820s while living in upstate New York . In 1823 , Smith said an angel directed him to a buried book written on golden plates containing the religious history of an ancient people . Smith published what he said was a translation of these plates in March 1830 as the Book of Mormon , named after Mormon , the ancient prophet ? historian who compiled the book . On April 6 , 1830 , Smith founded the Church of Christ . The early church grew westward as Smith sent missionaries to preach the restored gospel . In 1831 , the church moved to Kirtland , Ohio where missionaries had made a large number of converts and Smith began establishing an outpost in Jackson County , Missouri , where he planned to eventually build the city of Zion (or the New Jerusalem) . In 1833 , Missouri settlers , alarmed by the rapid influx of Mormons , expelled them from Jackson County into the nearby Clay County , where local residents took them in . After Smith led a mission , known as Zion 's Camp , to recover the land , he began building Kirtland Temple in Lake County , Ohio , where the church flourished . When the Missouri Mormons were later asked to leave Clay County in 1836 , they secured land in what would become Caldwell County .

The Kirtland era ended in 1838 , after the failure of a church @-@ sponsored bank caused widespread defections , and Smith regrouped with the remaining church in Far West , Missouri . During the fall of 1838 , tensions escalated into the Mormon War with the old Missouri settlers . On October 27 , the governor of Missouri ordered that the Mormons " must be treated as enemies " and be exterminated or driven from the state . Between November and April , some eight thousand displaced Mormons migrated east into Illinois .

In 1839 , the Mormons converted a swampland on the banks of the Mississippi River into Nauvoo , Illinois and began construction of the Nauvoo Temple . The city became the church 's new headquarters and gathering place , and it grew rapidly , fueled in part by converts immigrating from Europe . Meanwhile , Smith introduced temple ceremonies meant to seal families together for eternity , as well as the doctrines of eternal progression or exaltation , and plural marriage . Smith created a service organization for women called the Relief Society , as well as an organization called the Council of Fifty , representing a future theodemocratic " Kingdom of God " on the earth . Smith also published the story of his First Vision , in which the Father and the Son appeared to him while he was about 14 years old . This vision would come to be regarded by some Mormons as the most important event in human history after the birth , ministry , and resurrection of Jesus Christ .

In 1844 , local prejudices and political tensions , fueled by Mormon peculiarity and internal dissent , escalated into conflicts between Mormons and " anti @-@ Mormons " . On June 27 , 1844 , Smith and his brother Hyrum were killed by a mob in Carthage , Illinois . Because Hyrum was Smith 's logical successor , their deaths caused a succession crisis , and Brigham Young assumed leadership over the majority of Latter Day Saints . Young had been a close associate of Smith 's and was senior apostle of the Quorum of the Twelve . Smaller groups of Latter Day Saints followed other leaders to form other denominations of the Latter Day Saint movement .

= = = Pioneer era = = =

For two years after Smith 's death , conflicts escalated between Mormons and other Illinois residents . To prevent war , Brigham Young led the Mormon pioneers (constituting most of the Latter Day Saints) to a temporary winter quarters in Nebraska and then , eventually (beginning in 1847) , to what became the Utah Territory . Having failed to build Zion within the confines of

American society , the Mormons began to construct a society in isolation , based on their beliefs and values . The cooperative ethic that Mormons had developed over the last decade and a half became important as settlers branched out and colonized a large desert region now known as the Mormon Corridor . Colonizing efforts were seen as religious duties , and the new villages were governed by the Mormon bishops (local lay religious leaders) . The Mormons viewed land as commonwealth , devising and maintaining a co @-@ operative system of irrigation that allowed them to build a farming community in the desert .

From 1849 ? 52 , the Mormons greatly expanded their missionary efforts , establishing several missions in Europe , Latin America , and the South Pacific . Converts were expected to " gather " to Zion , and during Young 's presidency (1847 ? 77) over seventy thousand Mormon converts immigrated to America . Many of the converts came from England and Scandinavia , and were quickly assimilated into the Mormon community . Many of these immigrants crossed the Great Plains in wagons drawn by oxen , while some later groups pulled their possessions in small handcarts . During the 1860s , newcomers began using the new railroad that was under construction .

In 1852 , church leaders publicized the previously secret practice of plural marriage , a form of polygamy . Over the next 50 years , many Mormons (between 20 and 30 percent of Mormon families) entered into plural marriages as a religious duty , with the number of plural marriages reaching a peak around 1860 , and then declining through the rest of the century . Besides the doctrinal reasons for plural marriage , the practice made some economic sense , as many of the plural wives were single women who arrived in Utah without brothers or fathers to offer them societal support .

By 1857 , tensions had again escalated between Mormons and other Americans , largely as a result of accusations involving polygamy and the theocratic rule of the Utah Territory by Brigham Young . In 1857 , U.S. President James Buchanan sent an army to Utah , which Mormons interpreted as open aggression against them . Fearing a repeat of Missouri and Illinois , the Mormons prepared to defend themselves , determined to torch their own homes in the case that they were invaded . The relatively peaceful Utah War ensued from 1857 to 1858 , in which the most notable instance of violence was the Mountain Meadows massacre , when leaders of a local Mormon militia ordered the killing of a civilian emigrant party that was traveling through Utah during the escalating tensions . In 1858 , Young agreed to step down from his position as governor and was replaced by a non @-@ Mormon , Alfred Cumming . Nevertheless , the LDS Church still wielded significant political power in the Utah Territory .

At Young 's death in 1877 , he was followed by other LDS Church presidents , who resisted efforts by the United States Congress to outlaw Mormon polygamous marriages . In 1878 , the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Reynolds v. United States that religious duty was not a suitable defense for practicing polygamy , and many Mormon polygamists went into hiding ; later , Congress began seizing church assets . In September 1890 , church president Wilford Woodruff issued a Manifesto that officially suspended the practice of polygamy . Although this Manifesto did not dissolve existing plural marriages , relations with the United States markedly improved after 1890 , such that Utah was admitted as a U.S. state in 1896 . After the Manifesto , some Mormons continued to enter into polygamous marriages , but these eventually stopped in 1904 when church president Joseph F. Smith disavowed polygamy before Congress and issued a " Second Manifesto " calling for all plural marriages in the church to cease . Eventually , the church adopted a policy of excommunicating members found practicing polygamy , and today seeks actively to distance itself from " fundamentalist " groups that continue the practice .

= = = Modern times = = =

During the early 20th century , Mormons began to reintegrate into the American mainstream . In 1929 , the Mormon Tabernacle Choir began broadcasting a weekly performance on national radio , becoming an asset for public relations . Mormons emphasized patriotism and industry , rising in socioeconomic status from the bottom among American religious denominations to middle @-@

class . In the 1920s and 1930s , Mormons began migrating out of Utah , a trend hurried by the Great Depression , as Mormons looked for work wherever they could find it . As Mormons spread out , church leaders created programs that would help preserve the tight @-@ knit community feel of Mormon culture . In addition to weekly worship services , Mormons began participating in numerous programs such as Boy Scouting , a Young Women organization , church @-@ sponsored dances , ward basketball , camping trips , plays , and religious education programs for youth and college students . During the Great Depression , the church started a welfare program to meet the needs of poor members , which has since grown to include a humanitarian branch that provides relief to disaster victims .

During the later half of the 20th century , there was a retrenchment movement in Mormonism in which Mormons became more conservative , attempting to regain their status as a " peculiar people " . Though the 1960s and 1970s brought changes such as Women 's Liberation and the Civil Rights Movement , Mormon leaders were alarmed by the erosion of traditional values , the sexual revolution , the widespread use of recreational drugs , moral relativism , and other forces they saw as damaging to the family . Partly to counter this , Mormons put an even greater emphasis on family life , religious education , and missionary work , becoming more conservative in the process . As a result , Mormons today are probably less integrated with mainstream society than they were in the early 1960s .

Although black people have been members of Mormon congregations since Joseph Smith 's time , before 1978 , black membership was small . From 1852 to 1978 , the LDS Church enforced a policy that restricted men of black African descent from being ordained to the church 's lay priesthood . The church was sharply criticized for its policy during the civil rights movement , but the policy remained in force until a 1978 reversal that was prompted in part by questions about mixed @-@ race converts in Brazil . In general , Mormons greeted the change with joy and relief . Since 1978 , black membership has grown , and in 1997 there were approximately 500 @, @ 000 black members of the church (about 5 percent of the total membership) , mostly in Africa , Brazil and the Caribbean . Black membership has continued to grow substantially , especially in West Africa , where two temples have been built . Many black Mormons are members of the Genesis Group , an organization of black members that predates the priesthood ban , and is endorsed by the church .

The LDS Church grew rapidly after World War II and became a world @-@ wide organization as missionaries were sent across the globe . The church doubled in size every 15 to 20 years , and by 1996 , there were more Mormons outside the United States than inside . In 2012 , there were an estimated 14 @. @ 8 million Mormons , with roughly 57 percent living outside the United States . It is estimated that approximately 4 @. @ 5 million Mormons - roughly 30 % of the total membership - regularly attend services . A majority of U.S. Mormons are white and non @-@ Hispanic (84 percent) . Most Mormons are distributed in North and South America , the South Pacific , and Western Europe . The global distribution of Mormons resembles a contact diffusion model , radiating out from the organization 's headquarters in Utah . The church enforces general doctrinal uniformity , and congregations on all continents teach the same doctrines , and international Mormons tend to absorb a good deal of Mormon culture , possibly because of the church 's top @-@ down hierarchy and a missionary presence . However , international Mormons often bring pieces of their own heritage into the church , adapting church practices to local cultures .

Chile , Uruguay , and several areas in the South Pacific have a higher percentage of Mormons than the United States (which is at about 2 percent) . South Pacific countries and dependencies that are more than 10 percent Mormon include American Samoa , the Cook Islands , Kiribati , Niue , Samoa , and Tonga .

= = Culture and practices = =

Isolation in Utah had allowed Mormons to create a culture of their own . As the faith spread around the world , many of its more distinctive practices followed . Mormon converts are urged to undergo lifestyle changes , repent of sins , and adopt sometimes foreign standards of conduct . Practices common to Mormons include studying scriptures , praying daily , fasting regularly , attending Sunday

worship services , participating in church programs and activities on weekdays , and refraining from work on Sundays when possible . The most important part of the church services is considered to be the Lord 's Supper (commonly called sacrament) , in which church members renew covenants made at baptism . Mormons also emphasize standards they believe were taught by Jesus Christ , including personal honesty , integrity , obedience to law , chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage .

In 2010 , around 13 ? 14 percent of Mormons lived in Utah , the center of cultural influence for Mormonism . Utah Mormons (as well as Mormons living in the Intermountain West) are on average more culturally and / or politically conservative than those living in some cosmopolitan centers elsewhere in the U.S. Utahns self @-@ identifying as Mormon also attend church somewhat more on average than Mormons living in other states . (Nonetheless , whether they live in Utah or elsewhere in the U.S. , Mormons tend to be more culturally and / or politically conservative than members of other U.S. religious groups .) Utah Mormons often place a greater emphasis on pioneer heritage than international Mormons who generally are not descendants of the Mormon pioneers .

Mormons have a strong sense of communality that stems from their doctrine and history . LDS Church members have a responsibility to dedicate their time and talents to helping the poor and building the church . The church is divided by locality into congregations called " wards " , with several wards making up a " stake " . The vast majority of church leadership positions are lay positions , and church leaders may work 10 to 15 hours a week in unpaid church service . Observant Mormons also contribute 10 percent of their income to the church as tithing , and are often involved in humanitarian efforts . Many LDS young men , women and elderly couples choose to serve a proselytizing mission , during which they dedicate all of their time to the church , without pay .

Mormons adhere to the Word of Wisdom , a health law or code that is interpreted as prohibiting the consumption of tobacco , alcohol , coffee and tea , while encouraging the use of wholesome herbs , grains , fruits , and a moderate consumption of meat . The Word of Wisdom is also understood to forbid other harmful and addictive substances and practices , such as the use of illegal drugs and abuse of prescription drugs . Mormons also oppose behaviors such as viewing pornography and gambling .

The concept of a united family that lives and progresses forever is at the core of Latter @-@ day Saint doctrine , and Mormons place a high importance on family life . Many Mormons hold weekly family home evenings , in which an evening is set aside for family bonding , study , prayer and other wholesome activities . Latter @-@ day Saint fathers who hold the priesthood typically name and bless their children shortly after birth to formally give the child a name . Mormon parents hope and pray that their children will gain testimonies of the " gospel " so they can grow up and marry in temples .

Mormons have a strict law of chastity , requiring abstention from sexual relations outside of opposite @-@ sex marriage and strict fidelity within marriage . All sexual activity (heterosexual and homosexual) outside of marriage is considered a serious sin , with marriage recognized as only between a man and a woman . Same @-@ sex marriages are not performed or supported by the LDS Church . Church members are encouraged to marry and have children , and Latter @-@ day Saint families tend to be larger than average . Mormons are opposed to abortion , except in some exceptional circumstances , such as when pregnancy is the result of incest or rape , or when the life or health of the mother is in serious jeopardy . Many practicing adult Mormons wear religious undergarments that remind them of covenants and encourage them to dress modestly . Latter @-@ day Saints are counseled not to partake of any form of media that is obscene or pornographic in any way , including media that depicts graphic representations of sex or violence . Tattoos and body piercings are also discouraged , with the exception of a single pair of earrings for LDS women .

LGBT Mormons , or Mormons who self @-@ identify as gay , lesbian , or bisexual , remain in good standing in the church if they abstain from homosexual relations and obey the law of chastity . While there are no official numbers , LDS Family Services estimates that there are on average four or five members per LDS ward who experience same @-@ sex attraction . Gary Watts , former president of Family Fellowship , estimates that only 10 percent of homosexuals stay in the church . Many of

these individuals have come forward through different support groups or websites discussing their homosexual attractions and concurrent church membership .

= = Groups within Mormonism = =

= = = Latter @-@ day Saints = = =

Members of the LDS Church , also known as Latter @-@ day Saints , constitute over 99 percent of Mormons . The beliefs and practices of LDS Mormons are generally guided by the teachings of LDS Church leaders . There are , however , several smaller groups that differ from " mainstream " Mormonism in various ways .

LDS Church members who do not actively participate in worship services or church callings are often called " less @-@ active " (akin to the qualifying expressions non @-@ observant or non @-@ practicing used in relation to members of other religious groups) . The LDS Church does not release statistics on church activity , but it is likely that about 40 percent of Mormons in the United States and 30 percent worldwide regularly attend worship services . Reasons for inactivity can include lifestyle issues and problems with social integration . Activity rates tend to vary with age , and disengagement occurs most frequently between age 16 and 25 . A majority of less active members return to church activity later in life . Former Latter @-@ day Saints who seek to disassociate themselves from the religion are often referred to as ex @-@ Mormons .

= = = Fundamentalist Mormons = = =

Members of sects that broke with the LDS Church over the issue of polygamy have become known as fundamentalist Mormons ; these groups differ from mainstream Mormonism primarily in their belief in and practice of plural marriage . There are thought to be between 20 @,@ 000 and 60 @,@ 000 members of fundamentalist sects , (0 @.@ 1 ? 0 @.@ 4 percent of Mormons) , with roughly half of them practicing polygamy . There are a number of fundamentalist sects , the largest two being the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter @-@ Day Saints (FLDS Church) and the Apostolic United Brethren (AUB) . In addition to plural marriage , some of these groups also practice a form of Christian communalism known as the law of consecration or the United Order . The LDS Church seeks to distance itself from all such polygamous groups , excommunicating their members if discovered practicing or teaching it , and today a majority of Mormon fundamentalists have never been members of the LDS Church .

= = = Liberal Mormons = = =

Liberal Mormons , also known as Progressive Mormons , take an interpretive approach to LDS teachings and scripture . They look to the scriptures for spiritual guidance , but do not necessarily believe the teachings to be literally or uniquely true . For liberal Mormons , revelation is a process through which God gradually brings fallible human beings to greater understanding . Liberal Mormons place doing good and loving fellow human beings above the importance of believing correctly . In a separate context , members of small progressive breakaway groups have also adopted the label .

= = = Cultural Mormons = = =

Cultural Mormons are individuals who do not believe some (or many) of the doctrines of LDS Church , but who self @-@ identify as Mormon . Usually this is a result of having been raised in the LDS faith , or as having converted and spent a large portion of one 's life as an active member of the LDS Church . Cultural Mormons may or may not be actively involved with the church , and in some cases may not even be officially members of the church .

= = Beliefs = =

Mormons have a scriptural canon consisting of the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) , the Book of Mormon , and a collection of revelations and writings by Joseph Smith known as the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price . Mormons however have a relatively open definition of scripture . As a general rule , anything spoken or written by a prophet , while under inspiration , is considered to be the word of God . Thus , the Bible , written by prophets and apostles , is the word of God , so far as it is translated correctly . The Book of Mormon is also believed to have been written by ancient prophets , and is viewed as a companion to the Bible . By this definition , the teachings of Smith 's successors are also accepted as scripture , though they are always measured against , and draw heavily from the scriptural canon .

Mormons believe in " a friendly universe " , governed by a God whose aim it is to bring his children to immortality and eternal life . Mormons have a unique perspective on the nature of God , the origin of man , and the purpose of life . For instance , Mormons believe in a pre @-@ mortal existence where people were literal spirit children of God , and that God presented a plan of salvation that would allow his children to progress and become more like him . The plan involved the spirits receiving bodies on earth and going through trials in order to learn , progress , and receive a " fulness of joy " . The most important part of the plan involved Jesus , the eldest of God 's children , coming to earth as the literal Son of God , to conquer sin and death so that God 's other children could return . According to Mormons , every person who lives on earth will be resurrected , and nearly all of them will be received into various kingdoms of glory . To be accepted into the highest kingdom , a person must fully accept Christ through faith , repentance , and through ordinances such as baptism and the laying on of hands .

According to Mormons , a deviation from the original principles of Christianity , known as the Great Apostasy , began not long after the ascension of Jesus Christ . It was marked with the corruption of Christian doctrine by Greek and other philosophies , with followers dividing into different ideological groups . Mormons claim the martyrdom of the Apostles led to a loss of Priesthood authority to administer the church and its ordinances . Mormons believe that God restored the early Christian church through Joseph Smith . In particular , Mormons believe that angels such as Peter , James , John , John the Baptist , Moses , and Elijah appeared to Smith and others and bestowed various priesthood authorities on them . Mormons believe that their church is the " only true and living church " because of the divine authority restored through Smith . Mormons self @-@ identify as being Christian , while many Christians , particularly evangelical Protestants , disagree with this view . Mormons view other religions as having portions of the truth , doing good works , and having genuine value .

Though the LDS Church has a top @-@ down hierarchical structure with a president ? prophet dictating revelations for the whole church , there is a bottom @-@ up aspect as well . Ordinary Mormons have access to the same inspiration that is thought to guide their prophets , and are encouraged to seek their own personal revelations . Mormons see Joseph Smith 's first vision as proof that the heavens are open , and that God answers prayers . They place considerable emphasis on " asking God " to find out if something is true . Most Mormons do not claim to have had heavenly visions like Smith 's in response to prayers , but feel that God talks to them in their hearts and minds through the Holy Ghost . Though Mormons have some beliefs that are considered strange in a modernized world , they continue to hold onto their beliefs because they feel God has spoken to them .