

Presbyterians in many parts of the United States live in close proximity with Mormon neighbors. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, like the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), declares allegiance to Jesus. Both Latter-day Saints and Presbyterians use the Bible as scripture and share common theological terms. Nevertheless, Mormonism is a new religious tradition distinct from the historic apostolic tradition of the Church, of which Presbyterians are a part. Its theology and practices set it apart from the Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic churches. It views the canon of scriptures and interprets shared scriptures in radically different ways. Like Presbyterians, Latter-day Saints speak of God, the Trinity, Christ's death and resurrection, and salvation, yet they use the same words with dissimilar meanings.

Revelation. Latter-day Saints speak of receiving new revelations. The Reformed tradition, of which Presbyterians are a part, recognizes that the Holy Spirit leads the Church into deeper understandings of God's revelation but it believes that the canon of scripture is closed and the Bible is complete.

Salvation. Immortality and resurrection, according to Mormon teaching, are given to all through the unconditional atonement of Jesus Christ; but belief that some enjoy a process of eternal progression and exaltation explains the special importance Mormons give to acts of baptism for the dead, endowment, and marriage or sealing. In Reformed thought, faith, grace, and salvation are God's gifts freely given, which humans can only accept as they live in gratitude.

Presbyterians and Latter-day Saints have had a difficult history of mutual contacts.

Presbyterian relationships with Latter-day Saints have changed throughout the twentieth century. By God's grace they may change further.

Individuals of different religious traditions can live together in a spirit of dialogue. This spirit mixes conviction and commitment to one's own faith with an openness and respect for the other.

Dialogue can also occur at a more organized level, in groups which intentionally plan conversation and joint action. Presbyterians have not yet found many ways to engage in group relationships for dialogue with Latter-day Saints. While there may be situations of tension where dialogue is not possible or opportunities are limited, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) may learn much from local discussions as well as broader conversations with Latter-day Saints. Both Presbyterians and Mormons will need to be ready to speak and to listen. Both will need to agree that we are to love our neighbors and speak the truth in love.

For Presbyterians living in areas where Mormons are a sizeable or even a majority community, the many forms of cohesiveness among Mormons are often experienced as exclusion. Dialogue would provide a means for dealing with particular questions, theological or religious, political or social.

The 199th General Assembly (1987) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) gave general suggestions for relationships with people of newer religious traditions which profess allegiance to Jesus. The 206th General Assembly (1995) provided specific assistance to Presbyterians by establishing guidelines for interfaith relationships with Latter-day Saints whose church is headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Support the search to promote understanding

- Give attention to what is entailed in the lived-out faith of Presbyterians and of Mormons.
- Seek firm grounding in your own understanding of revelation. Resist the temptation to respond with fear or hostility if you are confronted with proselytizing efforts.
- Be aware of Mormon history and its relation to Mormon social cohesion.
- In predominantly Mormon areas, help new Presbyterian church members to learn about Reformed Christian traditions. Use special educational materials for pastors and church officers.

Support the search for cooperation

- Attempt to develop friendly relations built on mutual respect and understanding.
- Seek opportunities to work together with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Mormon people on common concerns in the larger society.
- Identify common interests for the good of the larger community based on converging moral imperatives, which need not imply full agreement on beliefs and practices.
- Raise questions, where necessary, about exclusion of minorities, their civil rights and possible means for easing social or economic pressures.
- When responding to invitations to Latter-day Saints' activities, understand yourself to be in an interfaith relationship (e.g., at Boy Scouts, Mutual Improvement Association, athletic events).

Support the search for witness

- As you make joyous witness to the good news of Jesus Christ among all people,

do not hesitate to share the gospel with people of Mormon background.

- Witness to your own faith rather than speaking against the other.
- Accept persons of Mormon background into active church membership on profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and administer baptism.
- Welcome to the Lord's Table persons baptized within the historic apostolic tradition. (Presbyterians do not invite Latter-day Saints to administer the Lord's Supper.)
- Do not manipulate conflict or negative feelings to encourage a change in faith community.
- Use guidelines for interfaith celebration and worship as appropriate, e.g., for weddings or funerals of interreligious families where Presbyterian pastors are called to assist.
- Exercise special pastoral care at funerals and memorial services involving Mormon-Presbyterian interreligious families.

See General Assembly actions on which this content is based: Nature of Revelation 1987; Mormons 1995.

Use Presbyterians and Mormons: A Study in Contrasts and the Resource Packet on Presbyterians and Latter-day Saints for study and guidance.

Resources

Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue* brochure, based on World Council of Churches guidelines. PDS#74-292-97-003

Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *Resource Packet on Presbyterians and Latter-day Saints*. Available 1998. PDS#74-292-98-001

Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *Respectful Presence: An Understanding of Interfaith Prayer and Celebration from a Reformed Christian Perspective*. Guidelines commended by 209th General Assembly (1997). PDS#74-292-97-002

Presbytery of Utah. *A Present Day Look at the Latter-day Saints*. Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1990. PDS #OGA-90-003.

Richards, LeGrand. *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*. Deseret Book Company, 1990. Missionary Reference Library mass-market edition.

Robinson, Stephen E. *Are Mormons Christians?* Bookcraft, 1991.

Shipp, Jan. *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*. University of Illinois Press, 1985.

Theology and Worship Unit, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *Presbyterians and Mormons: A Study in Contrasts*, with study guide and bibliography. 1990. Adopted for study and guidance by the 207th General Assembly (1995), PDS#273-90-001.

"... Mormonism differs from traditional Christianity in much the same fashion that traditional Christianity ... came to differ from Judaism."
Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition

"..... theology, history, and religious practices are legitimate topics for interfaith discussions and evaluations. Each of these comes second ... as an expression and implication of faith."
Presbyterians and Mormons: A Study in Contrasts Study Guide

"... self-serving descriptions of other peoples' faith are one of the roots of prejudice, stereotyping, and condescension. Listening carefully to the neighbors' self-understanding enables Christians better to obey the commandment not to bear false witness against their neighbors ...

"... any religion or ideology claiming universality ... will also have its own interpretations of other religions and ideologies as part of its own self-understanding. Dialogue gives an opportunity for a mutual questioning of the understanding partners have about themselves and others."
Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies



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