To Lou, Dirk and Gracie, and Drew
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This dissertation would not have been possible without my advisers at the University of Florida including my supervisor, Anna Peterson, and committee members, David Hackett, Whitney Sanford, and Marianne Schmink. These four scholars and four important communities are among those I remember as instrumental to my completion of the doctoral degree: the academic community at the University of Florida (UF); Florida International University (FIU); the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and its Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission (FFLM); and my loved ones. At UF, I thank those pioneers in our department who envisioned a new doctoral program organized to innovatively think about the study of religion through three tracks: Religion in the Americas, Asian Religions, and Religion and Nature. My interests have always been religion and politics in the Americas, with interests in the environment so this program was a good fit. Second, I thank the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for awarding to me the Aschoff Dissertation Writing Award, and to the Madelyn Lockhart Dissertation Fellowship Committee for choosing me as a finalist. Both awards facilitated my research and writing.

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all things Mormon, Dr. Streib has generously critiqued my MA thesis and doctoral prospectus.

I remain fortunate to reap the rewards of continuing relationships and conversations with mentors from FIU; Tony Maingot, Mike Collier, Eduardo Gamarra, and especially, Terry Rey who has provided me with new teaching opportunities and continued mentoring at Temple University. The 2003 MALACS Thesis of Distinction Award helped make possible my attendance at the University of Florida.

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possible support necessary to help facilitate writing. Finally, the Media Public Library in our hometown ordered numerous interlibrary loans through able facilitation by Trish Giardinelli and John Kennedy.

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In addition to those who have made this research possible, none of this would have happened without the ongoing goodwill and cooperation of so many Latter-day Saints. The church is historically renowned for its prolific records, and through the assistance of John Sager and Rose Chibota at the Management Information Center, I had access to all records on membership publically available upon request. During my field trip to the Idaho Falls, Idaho temple opening, I was provided a personalized temple tour by Public Affairs Director Terry McCurdy. Most of all, I express profound gratitude for the Latter-day Saints of the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission, many of whom I met during my master’s research on conversions and have continued relationships fostering new fieldwork. I have enjoyed every kindness and generosity bestowed upon a non-member, for which my thanksgiving is without end. Through their generosity, I’ve shared Family Home Evenings, sacrament services along with Sunday school and Relief Society meetings, baptisms, General and Semi-Annual Conferences, activities, their narratives through interviews and oral histories, hopes and dreams, and best of all, their children and elders – their families. Through the ten years I have been studying
and working in the South Florida community, I have watched their children grow up to become missionaries, return to marry and have babies of their own, the next generation of missionaries in lineages of belief and service. Several members have continued to answer follow-up and clarifying questions; as this project has drawn on, their capacity for commitment has encouraged me. As I wrote in my thesis acknowledgements, “I’ve felt a special, kindred spirit among the “Mormons” that has forever changed me.” That sentiment is even truer today as my own understanding of their religion has deepened. Mormons teach that families can be eternal, and that perspective has provided a special recognition within my own family.

I must end with those who have always been with me and will always be – my family. To Dirk and Drew, my sons, I am forever grateful for what has become your mentoring, when it should have been the other way around. When I first returned to college, you were teenagers. Now you are young men with advanced degrees of your own. I’ve enjoyed reading your work and thank you for reading mine, offering comments and edits, and I’m proud you have both published. You have been extraordinary friends, in addition to being sons any mother would have been proud to have. Along this path, thanks to Dirk, Gracie Kerns has joined our family, a very welcome daughter-in-law. To my late parents Dori and Jay, who departed while I was in the doctoral process and much too soon, I trust you are witness still. I miss you very much. My brothers and sisters, Kaye, Jim and Deb, Keryl and Lisa, Greg and Celeste; and many nieces and nephews share love and support, making sure the boys and I have enjoyed frequent trips home to Colorado to keep those all-important family lineages alive and well.
I thank someone new in my life along the dissertation way: Louis John Pagnoni, my husband. It is a miracle we met, and an even greater miracle that you have stayed this PhD course with me, often at great distances. You have lovingly embraced of my sons and my family, while sharing your children and family with me. Thank you for asking me to marry you and helping me finish this project.

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Writing acknowledgements is a very humbling experience in gratitude. There are so many important people to recognize as having contributed to the process of writing a doctoral dissertation. Of course, the most worrisome consideration is inadvertently omitting someone, as I did when I wrote acknowledgements for my master’s thesis. I also must thank anthropologist Terry Prewitt at the University of West Florida, my undergraduate major professor who wrote for my graduate school application, and insisted I read Oscar Lewis’s *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in Culture and Poverty*, and Immanuel Wallerstein’s *The Modern World System*, both of which continue to inform my work today. Additionally, I thank Paul, Linda, Pete and Pamela Sweeney who helped this country girl negotiate life in urban Miami. With all this inspiration and assistance there will nevertheless be errors and they alone are mine. As the FFLM mission president’s wife encouraged with me: “onward and upward!”
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<td><strong>Active</strong></td>
<td>As in members who are ‘active members,’ these are the members who meet all the requirements, such as serving callings, paying a full tithe, observing the Word of Wisdom and Law of Chastity, and participate in worship and member activities.</td>
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<td><strong>Apostasy</strong></td>
<td>As in the Great Apostasy, this was the loss of the authentic and true teachings of Jesus Christ in the apostolic church. All of traditional Christianity and its derivative denominations are inauthentic expressions of the original Christianity as taught by Jesus Christ.</td>
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<td><strong>Apostate</strong></td>
<td>Any member who has disaffiliated from the LDS Church and abandoned faith, and in particular, any who are hostile to the church.</td>
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<td><strong>Baptism</strong></td>
<td>By full immersion in water, anyone repentant may participate in this saving ordinance, if at least the age of accountability of eight years and older. Followed by the laying on of hands, the gifts of the Holy Ghost are conferred as the confirmation ordinance.</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Baptizing the dead</strong></td>
<td>A living temple worthy member serves as a proxy for a dead person, undergoes full immersion in the temple waters as an invitation of baptism for the dead person who was not an LDS member. Based on 1 Corinthians 15:29, the ordinance is also called ‘redeeming the dead.’</td>
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<td><strong>Bishop</strong></td>
<td>The leader of the ward, or congregation, such as a parish priest or congregational minister, although no ordination is required.</td>
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<td><strong>Calling</strong></td>
<td>Laity service in the church, which may include a term of service in Primary, or for life as an Apostle or Prophet. Most callings are unpaid and temporary.</td>
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<td><strong>Chastity</strong></td>
<td>As in the Law of, requiring chaste behavior and modesty in all things, abstinence from sexual activity outside of monogamous marriage, and is a commandment in Mormonism.</td>
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<td><strong>Correlation</strong></td>
<td>The program developed and implemented in the 1960s to conform all church programs and literatures to insure doctrinal integrity, placing the responsibility for all church life under the direction of the priesthood.</td>
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Covenant  As in new and everlasting covenant, which "is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The sum of all gospel covenants that God makes with mankind is called "the new and everlasting covenant" and consists of several individual covenants, each of which is called "a new and an everlasting covenant." It is "new" when given to a person or a people for the first time, and "everlasting" because the gospel of Jesus Christ and Plan of Salvation existed before the world was formed and will exist forever" (Clark 1992:1008-1009). The LDS restoration of this covenant and its covenants renews all covenants made between God and his covenant people in all dispensations.

Dispensation  An era of time in salvation history attended over by a prophet and in which the authentic church of Jesus Christ was on Earth, followed by an apostasy. There have been six dispensations come to pass – Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ’s apostles, and finally the seventh of Joseph Smith and his prophetic successors.

General Conference  Conferences in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are convened annually the first weekend of April to commemorate the founding of the church in 1830, and Semi-annual Conferences are held the first weekend of October. These conferences are satellite broadcast all over the world from Salt Lake City and over two days, eight hours of talks by the Prophet, the First Presidency and General Authorities, and leaders of the church instruct, admonish, encourage, and plead with its global followers to follow this one and only true church of Jesus Christ. These conferences, which are open to the general membership, each produce an approximate 30 speeches in primary documents, including six priesthood session speeches (attended only by priesthood holding men).

Endowment  The saving temple ordinance, which reenacts the restoration of all covenants through recollection of the plan of salvation. Conferred on adults, generally prior to mission service or marriage, it is the foundational temple ritual.

Family Home Evening  Regularly scheduled one night per week, typically on Monday, in which the whole family is to gather for recreation, spiritual enrichment, prayers, and the meal.

Fast and Testimony  One Sunday per month, each ward’s members fast for two meals and donate that savings as a fast offering into a church fund specifically for the poor. At the corresponding Sunday Sacrament Service, the members share in public their testimonies.
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<th>Term</th>
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<td>Firesides</td>
<td>Supplemental meetings for specific age cohorts generally held in the evenings. These events are particularly popular with the youth and single young adults.</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Presidency</td>
<td>The president of the church and his two counselors. The president is also the prophet, seer, and revelator.</td>
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<td>First Vision</td>
<td>The paradigmatic first revelation to Joseph Smith, Jr. in 1820 in which God and his son, Jesus Christ, appeared in flesh and bones bodies glorified to answer Joseph’s question about which religion to join. He was told to join none of them, all of which were in error, and in the future, he may become the person to bring forth the true and restored church. This inaugural revelation is considered the founding revelation of the church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulness</td>
<td>As in the fullness of time, which for Mormons means the final dispensation when the authentic church is restored in full; only the LDS have the complete truth.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Four Standard Works</td>
<td>The canon of Mormonism including the Book of Mormon as another testament and of Jesus Christ’s ministry to the descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel in the Americas; Doctrines and Covenants, which is the compilation of modern revelations; the Pearl of Great Price containing the inspired writings of Joseph Smith including the Book of Moses and Abraham; and the King James Bible by Joseph Smith’s translation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Authorities</td>
<td>Consists of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles – fifteen men are the ultimate priesthood authority. They are assisted by the presidency of the Quorum of the Seventy, the First and Second Quorums of the Seventy, and the Presiding Bishopric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospel</td>
<td>Not the gospel texts of the New Testament, but rather the restored ‘good news’ of the authentic church returned to the Earth in this final dispensation. This restoration is possible through revelation to Joseph Smith and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, another testament of Jesus Christ in the Americas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavenly Father</td>
<td>The name most commonly used to refer to God, the eternal father and creator. With a flesh and bones body glorified, along with the Heavenly Mother, he is the eternal procreator of spirit children in the pre-mortal realm.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Heavenly Mother  The Heavenly Father’s partner in eternal procreation, often considered his wife. This model of holy, eternal parentage is the model for all worthy Mormons.

Home teaching  Home visitation provided by teams of the priesthood to each member monthly.

Institute  Church programs of religious study for collegiate students, typically with an Institute building on or near the college campus.

Investigator  Any person interested in the church who sits for the missionaries’ gospel lessons, studies pursuant to their instructions, and may potentially become interested in conversion.

Lamanites  The Book of Mormon people in the Americas descended from Laman, one of the original Israelite settlers from Jerusalem, circa 600 B.C. Native American groups are believed to be in the lineage of Laman.

Manifesto  Based on the 1890 revelation to President Wilford Woodruff, this proclamation overturned the practice of plural marriage.

Peculiar people  The phrase Mormons use to describe their relationship with God as his ‘chosen’ or covenant people. Taken from numerous scriptures, they are in this world, but not of this world. Further, they have peculiar religious features that set them apart from the world’s other Christians.

Pioneer  The term pioneer has specific salience in Mormonism as any person who helps originate a new area of the church, recalling the “pioneer company” led by Brigham Young to the Great Salt Lake Basin arriving July 24, 1847; the early settlers of the American west and those who continued Mormon colonies in Mexico and Canada; and finally, the people first converted to Mormonism in any new nation who establish the church and its programs in its new locale.

Plural marriage  Based on revelations to Joseph Smith, recorded in *Doctrines & Covenants* 132, priesthood holders were allowed to marry multiple women until the practice was overturned in 1890; commonly referred to as polygamy.

Priesthood  The only authentic authority to act in the name of God through the restoration of the original church of Jesus Christ, where Adam was the first priest. The lower priesthood, the Aaronic, is granted to worthy men age twelve and older; the higher priesthood, the
Melchizedek, is conferred on worthy men of age eighteen who are called Elders.

Primary Church education for children under the age of twelve.

Prophet, Seer, Revelator The president of the church holds the specific keys to administer the church during his administration. He speaks, from a position of authority to receive ongoing revelation, along with the validating counsel of his counselors and apostles on behalf of the church.

Proselyting The term used for active men and women missionaries who are charged with full-time teaching missions. While Mormons say they “proselyte,” the academic literature uses the term “proselytize” and its past tense and gerund forms. The terms are synonymous and are used interchangeably in this study, depending on the context. While other Christians prefer the term “evangelize” to proselytize, Mormons do not use the word evangelize and it is therefore not found in this study of Mormon mission.

Recommend As in temple recommend, this certificate of worthiness is issued only to active members for the purposes of temple participation. This certification verifies that those entering the temple are worthy members, who will not defile the temple, and will hold sacred all temple rites. Recommend holders are subject to a worthiness interview every two years with their bishop and stake president before reissue.

Relief Society The official auxiliary organization of church women, organized for charitable and service purposes. The Relief Society conducts monthly visiting teachings, educational services, and spiritual enrichment opportunities. They meet every Sunday following Sacrament Services.

Revelation God’s communication with humans through the Holy Ghost, which had been lost due to the Great Apostasy. Restored in Mormonism, revelation comes to the president and General Authorities on behalf of the church. Additionally, revelation comes to the worthy member on behalf of his or her family.

Sacrament Sunday The worship service for the partaking of the sacrament in community, followed by an hour or religious study, and an activity hour with the appropriate age cohort; sometimes referred to as the Sabbath.
Stake  The geographic organization of congregations similar to a diocese. The stake is the largest unit of local power, is administered by the stake president, and has within its jurisdiction all the wards and branches for that geographic membership area.

Seminary  Church religious studies for high school students, ages fourteen to eighteen. Generally, the classes are held prior to attendance at high school.

Testimony  The receipt of a personal revelation from the Holy Ghost that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the one true and restored church on the earth through their prophets, Joseph Smith and his successors. Once received, Mormons are encouraged to publicly share their testimonies.

Tithe  One-tenth of one’s income paid to the church annually. Although voluntary, a temple recommend will not be issued in the absence of tithing. These tithes go to the general fund of the church in Salt Lake City for buildings, missions, and education.

Visiting teaching  Home visitation of members quarterly by Relief Society members for the purpose of spiritual nurturing, emotional support, and general welfare needs.

Ward  The basic congregational unit of membership worship, such as a parish or congregation.

Word of Wisdom  The health codes found in *Doctrines & Covenants* 89, including prohibitions on coffee, tea, hot drinks, alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs. Considered doctrine, breaking this code can result in temple exclusion.

Worthy  To be righteous in all things and to be an active member, this attribute is to obey all covenants, commandments, and requirements of the church.

Young men  The age cohort of males twelve to eighteen and its auxiliary church program of associated activities, including participation in the Boy Scouts of America.

Young women  The age cohort of females twelve to eighteen and its auxiliary church program of associated activities.
An Explanation of Terms

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has developed a vocabulary particular to its meanings and purposes, not unlike other religions. Because the LDS understand their religion to be the restoration of the ancient and original church of Jesus Christ revealed in modern times, old terms have acquired some new meanings in LDS parlance. Many of the words found in their vocabulary are ordinary everyday terms (e.g., "pioneer"), or words used in other religions (e.g., "covenant"), but with definitions accrued that are uniquely Mormon.

The list above is not an exhaustive list of all specific terms used in Mormonism, but it includes a list of those found in this study. When employed herein, the scholarly purpose is not to advocate for their usage as would be the case in apologetic writings or faithful scholarship. Instead, I use their language to convey through ethnography how they understand their religion and its relationship to the larger social context. Although most of the terms will be contextualized within the respective chapters of this study, this List of Terms serves as a quick reference guide for Mormon definitions. All terms are based upon LDS sources including Historical Dictionary of Mormonism (Bitton and Alexander 2000), Encyclopedia of Mormonism (Ludlow 1992), and Mormon Doctrine (McConkie 1966).
Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

BUILDING THE LATTER-DAY KINGDOM IN THE AMERICAS: THE FLORIDA FORT LAUDERDALE MISSION

By
Gayle Lasater Pagnoni

May 2013

Chair: Anna L. Peterson
Major: Religion

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is expanding globally but nowhere more prominently than in the Americas where eighty-five percent of members reside. Despite the fact that Mormon missionary work is a prominent identifying institution, there is little research on Mormon missionaries in operating missions. The Mormons employ a unique mission enterprise, which they call the ‘three-fold mission’ – proclaim the gospel, perfect the saints, and redeem the dead. In this dissertation I argue that through the three-fold mission of the church Mormons employ the ancient Hebraic covenant to restore what for them is the true church of Jesus Christ. By using the concept of covenant, they structure their religio-cultural institutions and identity, and simultaneously mobilize their missionary movement. The Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission (FFLM) provides a case study in the Americas of proselytizing missionaries who proclaim the gospel; and among returned missionaries and converts who perfect the saints in local stakes. Based on their faithfulness, the FFLM is the site of a new temple to open in 2014 where they will redeem their dead. Understanding themselves to be a
new covenant people, they invite all people universally into their Mormon identity through their three-fold mission. In so doing, the Mormons demonstrate features of the old and new paradigms in the sociology of religion and they utilize ongoing revelation as entirely rational to guide their work as they restore what they believe is revealed only to them – the original church of Jesus Christ in the modern world.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints\(^1\) is expanding all over the world, but most prominently in the Americas where Mormon theology joins the Western Hemisphere to salvation history. Among the more than fourteen million members officially counted, almost twelve million Mormons are found in the Americas – from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska, and Canada to Florida and across the Caribbean – where most of the 52,000 global proselytizing missionaries are working. As the main engine of growth, Mormon expansion is dependent upon its ‘three-fold mission’ that is to ‘proclaim the gospel, perfect the saints, and to redeem the dead.’ Missionaries proclaim the gospel, inviting potential converts to ‘come unto Christ.’ Once in the church, the new convert joins with local members in a total new way of life. To be an ‘active member’ in this church is to participate in the Christian restoration of the ancient Hebraic covenant between God and his people, which Latter-day Saints believe is revealed only to them through their prophet, Joseph Smith, and his successors, as the “new and everlasting covenant” (Alexander 1987:44) As missionaries spread the Joseph Smith story, increasing the numbers of Mormons throughout the Americas, there is the potential for transformation in the lives of individual converts and missionaries, their families and communities, and ultimately, in their cultures and societies. To change the world is the goal of all missionary enterprises and the Mormons are no exception.

\(^1\) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the official name and that which its members prefer for their church. Because the length of the name can become cumbersome, I will use their preferred abbreviation for the name of the church – the LDS Church. The term church will be capitalized in the official name and when accompanied by LDS or Catholic, and when quoted; otherwise, the word church will be in small case. Also in accordance with their vernacular, I use the terms Latter-day Saints, LDS, and Mormons interchangeably when speaking of their religio-cultural group. Saints is capitalized when used in the official name of the church or in Latter-day Saints as an identifier. If the term saints stands alone, it is in lower case.
Research Questions and Significance of the Study

My studies of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began with a general interest in social ethics, politics, and religious transformation in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), or what is generally called the protestantization of Latin America, or more accurately its religious diversification. Simultaneously studying anthropology and sociology, I was left ambivalent about the role of all missionaries in the Americas; the preservation of cultures is a worthy endeavor, yet cultural contact is unavoidable. There are numerous forces other than missionaries changing local populations and indigenous cultures, including anthropologists, among whom I count myself. This is the anthropologist’s dilemma – despite every best intention not to, the culture is changed by the very presence of the anthropologist. Missionaries, however, go with the explicit intention of changing people, and their cultures. In the case of the Latter-day Saints, that transformation comes through the efforts of missionaries spreading the restoration of the ancient covenant they believe is contained only in their religion.

This dissertation continues to examine a question that has perplexed me for years and led to other questions: What is the explanation for the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Americas, particularly among Latin American and Caribbean peoples, where overwhelmingly the potential recruits are Roman Catholic? What could the appeals possibly be? If the appeals for a new religion in LAC are what sociologists of religion call the ‘demand side’ what is the role of the ‘supply side’ or, in other words, what is the role of Mormon missions and missionaries supplied by the church in its global expansion? Within the diversification of religion in Latin America, what is the role of the Mormon missionary, and what are the political
implications in this profound religious change? Among Mormon missionaries what
guides them, motivates their service, and how does the mission experience change
their lives? Among Mormons, what does it mean to be have the status of a ‘returned
missionary’?

Toward an answer to these research questions, during my master’s work in Latin
American and Caribbean Studies, I began by reading together Mormon America: The
Power and the Promise (Ostling and Ostling 1999) and the missionary accounts from
Mexico of sociologists and returned missionaries, Gary Shepherd and Gordon
Shepherd, Mormon Passage (1998). Reading of the power and promise of institutional
Mormonism and the engine of that power and promise – its missionaries – turned out to
be the perfect framing for a new research agenda. Considering that missionary efforts
are fundamentally grass-roots movements, and understanding that grass-root dynamics
potentially yields social and cultural change, I found the prospect of speaking with Latin
American and Caribbean converts most intriguing during the first study (Lasater 2003).
The question that animated that study was what were the appeals of the LDS Church
for people who were mostly of Roman Catholic backgrounds? That research
demonstrates that among participants from throughout the Americas, converts often in
crisis found order, meaning, and belonging in a family-centric Christianity through a
staged process of conversion. While order, meaning, and belonging suggested the
features of a sacred canopy, another recurrent appeal among those converts was the
role of the Mormon missionary in that conversion process. Another question emerged;
how does Mormonism structure a sacred canopy by mobilizing its forces? What
concept captures these simultaneous processes?
Throughout the Americas, where conversion to Mormonism demonstrates the demand for a new religion, this second study investigates the supply side of the religious transformation equation – the work of missionaries in an operating Mormon mission. Beyond the stereotypes of pairs of naïve, young-adult male Mormon missionaries on bicycles, what is their role in conversion, how are they organized into missions, and what are the transformational implications of their work? How do they reckon with culture, more specifically, does Mormon culture supplant native or Catholic culture among their recruits? Knowing that the results of missionary work change individual converts and their families how does the experience of missionary work change missionaries and their families? In Mormonism, are there political implications for mission work as has been found in Catholic mission service?

With interests in social ethics and recognizing the intersection of religion and politics, in Latin America in particular, conservative American political forces aligned against liberation theologians, pastoral workers, and the poor during the 1980s in the shadow of Vatican II and the new papacy of John Paul II. Roman Catholic mission workers from the U. S. and Europe, living among the indigenous and poor in the region, were often radicalized toward leftist politics in favor of the liberation theological ‘preferential option for the poor.’ The rise of progressive Catholicism and its social critique of LAC structural inequalities found voice in social activism and its criticism of American foreign policy.

Meanwhile, President Ronald Reagan was an admirer of the Mormons, who were playing an enlarging role in conservative American politics. So, an intriguing question emerged for me – if Catholic mission workers were radicalized leftward by the Latin
American poor, how were Mormon missionaries influenced after proselytizing among the same populations? While recognizing that Mormon proselytizing missions are for two years at the longest, rather than for a lifetime as in the case of most Catholic pastoral workers, I nevertheless wanted to know how mission work changes Mormon lives. Knowing they would likely come home as returned missionaries (a special status in the church) and start families and lead their church, what would they later think about their missions among the poor? Were they also influenced toward the left; or did service among the poor impact their politics at all, and if so, how? What about the people they served; do returned missionaries remember them and stay in touch; what do they think about poor people and structural inequalities in retrospect?

Some of the answers to these questions contained in this study were surprising. What I found generally, was that these LDS members had an ambiguous relationship with culture, giving varying answers to the questions of cultural encounter. But, they are not too very worried about cultural implications believing fully in their mission to convert the world. Further, these participants were not influenced leftward as a result of working among the poor and instead, their missions reinforced or made concrete their conservative views. When confronted with poverty and suffering among others, they did not seem to question why, or they had air-tight explanations such as it was not their role to question or critique socio-political forces in the host country. Therefore, these participants are generally less concerned about structural inequalities and instead hold all individuals, including the poor, responsible for their own life choices. I came to understand how they apply and teach the principle of ‘personal agency’ in Mormonism, irrespective of social pathologies, and how missionary work is both a product of
personal agency and a purveyor of that principle encouraging people to change their lives through religious conversion. Most importantly, I found that these members take seriously their personal responsibility for what they call the ‘three-fold mission’ of the church, which is to proclaim the gospel, perfect the saints, and redeem the dead by building family lineages of belief and service through their congregational lives. Through this three-fold mission, Mormons make covenants with God and each other and keep those covenants.

The purpose of this case study of the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission (FFLM) is to research the role of active missionaries in conversions, the role of returned missionaries and converts leading the mission’s local congregations, and the operation of a multi-cultural Mormon mission in a diverse urban portal to the Americas. This study presents research that demonstrates the lives of ordinary ‘active Mormons’ at all levels of participation in the FFLM as they advance the three-fold mission of the church. The LDS mission enterprise is unique in all of global Christian mission and there is much to learn from how they spread their religion throughout the Americas. This research helps to fill a gap in the literature on one of the most distinctive features of Mormonism – its missionaries and congregations in an operating mission. In a larger perspective, this research provides a better understanding of the diversification of religions in the Americas, the intersection of religion, politics, and personal agency, and the role of missionaries in these transformative processes. Theoretically, I find Mormonism fits both the old and new paradigms in the sociology of religion as they employ rational revelation to guide the three-fold mission of their church. The Latter-day Saints structure and animate their religion through their employment of the concept of the
covenant. In Latter-day reckoning, the ancient Hebrew covenant is renewed in them as the new and everlasting covenant providing their Christian identity and restoring the original church of Jesus Christ in modern times.

**Methodology**

To employ a qualitative, ethnographic approach with the intention of studying a community of Latter-day Saints (LDS) in the Americas, there was no better place than to return to the site of my 2003 study in the greater Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach county area. In the gateway metropolis of Miami-Fort Lauderdale, there are peoples from throughout the Americas, and some of them are Mormons. The Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission (FFLM) is the name of the Mormon mission geographically situated to spread the religion through southeast Florida and into the Caribbean. Founded in 1960, in this mission it is possible to sample widely from numerous ethnicities among the people living and converting, and transiting through this region. This diversity among Mormon members provides a unique opportunity to study active and returned missionaries in a vibrant, multi-cultural mission with a new temple under construction.

With key research participants already in place, a snowball sample\(^2\) of ‘active Mormons’ – active missionaries (AMs), returned missionaries (RM), and convert leaders – was readily obtained from all four local ‘stakes in Zion’ (dioceses) located from Boca Raton, to Fort Lauderdale, and to Miami.\(^3\) Although Latter-day Saints are

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\(^2\) Official LDS records do not track ethnicity. LDS ethnographer Jessie Embry, whose qualitative collection of oral histories through snowball sampling serves as a model, acknowledges it is not therefore possible to access a random sample of ethnic membership, making for a “researcher’s nightmare” (Embry 1992a:101).

\(^3\) ‘Stakes in Zion’ is the LDS idiom for building their local congregations thereby creating Zion where they are located; in this way Zion is a metaphor and will be discussed more in Chapter 4. Unless quoted by an
variously observant, my interest and sample includes the active Mormons who are responsible for the growth of their church. As active members in a laity church they belong to a core or nucleus of Mormons who participate in what Mormons call the three-fold mission of the church – proclaim the gospel, perfect the saints, and redeem the dead.

The active missionaries proclaim the gospel, inviting people to join their church. This sample included young adult men and women, most of who came from the Intermountain western states in long lineages of missionary families. From a list provided by the mission president, I recruited those men available for focus group sessions during the April 2008 General Conference. The young women were likewise recruited in June 2008. The missionaries participated in focus groups and filled out questionnaires, and mission officials provided the workings of the mission in interviews. Several young men taught me the missionary lessons as an ‘investigator’ of the church. From transcriptions of the focus groups, lessons, and field notes I have used their narratives to tell the story of this multi-cultural mission as a case study of active Mormon missionary work in the Americas. In most cases, I have used their proper nouns ‘Elder’ to designate men proselytizing missionaries and ‘Sister’ for women. Further, I have appended the first initial from their last name (e.g., Elder N. or Sister H.) to their questionnaires in the footnotes for identification.

As the church grows by numerical conversions, stakes are established where in congregational life, Mormons strive for perfection. The congregations are dependent...
upon leadership, which draws heavily from returned missionaries (RMs). This snowball sample included men and women returned missionaries from service throughout the Americas. To conduct interviews with the highest leaders in the mission and its stakes, the sample was expanded to a few converts who had not served as proselytizing missionaries. Their informal semi-structured interviews or oral histories transcribed tell their narratives and provide their lineages of missionary families, their conversions stories, their retrospectives on missionary work in the Americas, and the post-mission lives as parents and leaders. As leaders in this mission they are in charge of the ecclesiastical affairs of all members, with accountability to the General Authorities in Salt Lake City, Utah. As their collective narratives tell, they are also responsible for perfecting themselves, each other, and their families in local stakes in Zion where they engage in numerous weekly activities. I have used pseudonyms for these participants in the text for smoother readings, each of which is attended by a footnote with the date of the interview including the designation RM for returned missionary, or RS for returned sister, and followed by their last initial (e.g., RMC & RSC as in the case of a returned missionary couple where both had served and were interviewed together).

As frequently as invited, I participated in fieldtrips and participant observation including Family Home Evenings, sacrament services along with Sunday school and Relief Society meetings, baptisms, General and Semi-Annual Conferences, ward and stake conferences, and youth activities. During my field trip to the Idaho Falls, Idaho temple opening, I was provided a personalized temple tour with a county commissioner and a journalist covering the opening. For official macro-statistics, the church’s Management Information Center, Member and Statistical Records Department provided
requested information. The comprehensive church website contains all of their church programs, teachings, manuals, General Authorities’ speeches and writings, and other sources. Additionally, there is the vast ‘Mormon Bloggernacle.’ The Bloggernacle houses numerous blog sites that are written by Mormon scholars and others. Finally, this study draws from the literature in anthropology, sociology, and phenomenology of religion, and Mormon studies including history and social science.

Guiding this ethnography, I have relied on Michael Agar (1996) who argues that ethnographers are “apprentices” to a tradition in which they are situated as “professional strangers.” Shulamit Reinharz (2011) helped me see the passage of time in the process of ethnography as a net positive rather than a disadvantage. Reinharz argues that when the ethnographer is faced with existential questions, it makes her study of “others” more empathetic; this may be especially true in religion studies where researchers and participants alike grapple with big existential issues. Her method of ethnography calls for a tri-part scheme applied to narrative, for the participants’ lives as well as the ethnographer’s process: before, during, and after. Her scheme reinforced my 2003 decision to frame those participants’ oral histories in a three-part construct: predisposing conditions, situational conditions, and determining conditions of conversion (Lasater 2003). Likewise, in this study, that tri-part scheme has comported well to these members’ narratives and oral histories. Given the retrospective of time, hindsight helped make things more clear (Reinharz 2011:208) to this ethnographer. Finally, H. Russell Bernard’s (2002) instruction in qualitative methods is particularly helpful in my justification for using phenomenology, which will be discussed more in Chapter 4. He writes: “good ethnography—a narrative that describes a culture or part
of a culture—is usually good phenomenology, and there is still no substitute for a good story, well told, especially if you’re trying to make people understand how the people you’ve studied think and feel about their lives” (2002:23). What follows, I hope, is a good story.

Outline of the Chapters

Chapters 1 through 5 comprise the background for this study. Chapters 6 through 13 contain the case study, followed by a conclusion. After this introduction, Chapter 2 opens with what the Latter-day Saints believe is their restoration of the covenant, and Mormon mission as a covenant imperative. The chapter situates the study of Mormon mission within an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. In this dissertation I argue that through the three-fold mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints they employ the ancient Hebraic covenant to restore what for them is the true church of Jesus Christ revealed in modern times. By using the concept of covenant, they structure their religio-cultural institutions and identity and mobilize their missionary movement. The three-fold mission enterprise, which is unlike any other Christian mission structure or praxis, is supported by the three plausibility structures of mission, stake, and temple. As a predominantly Western Hemispheric church, the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission (FFLM) provides a case study in the Americas of active proselytizing missionaries who proclaim the gospel; among returned missionaries and converts who perfect the saints in local stakes; and in the temple work to redeem the dead. Understanding themselves to be a new covenant people, they invite all people into their Mormon identity. With the knowledge that Mormonism claims to be the restoration of the ancient patriarchal church in modern times, it is both a structured, hierarchical church and a church that is nevertheless highly mobilized and competitive.
To understand both features, I employ Peter Berger’s (1967) “sacred canopy” for structure along with Daniele Hervieu-Léger’s (2000) enactment of a collective “chain of memory” through missionary “lineages of belief” that mobilize to recruit new members into lineages.

Chapter 3 considers Mormonism in the sociology of religion’s old and new paradigms, where it demonstrates features of both. Because Mormonism is hierarchical, aspires to monopoly designs, understands its covenant status as ‘given,’ and has a high rate of ascribed membership, it fits the contours of the old paradigm. It also has features of a modern religion in the new paradigm; it is competitive, rational, mobilized, entrepreneurial, and recruits all over the world. Demonstrating these contours problematizes the paradigms. Further, there is no feature in either paradigm that explains a distinctive characteristic of Mormonism: modern revelation.

Because Mormons claim the restoration of revelation as the foundation of their church, Chapter 4 attends to the phenomena of religious revelatory experience in the rationality everyday Mormon life. Every active Mormon member is to employ personal revelation to guide their personal and family lives. Mormons understand religious experience as rational rather than metaphorical. By modern revelation the church has been restored and mobilized, but within boundaries constrained by prophetic authority.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the history of Mormon missionary work in the Americas since the first missions to the Lamanites on the American frontier. Early in its history, Parley Pratt attempted a Chilean mission, which was aborted. Mormon exiles from the Great Salt Basin colonized Mexico. Opening a mission in Argentina in 1925, it was after World War II that LDS expansion took off throughout the Americas along with
other missionary movements. This chapter considers the challenges of growth including cultural encounters, retention, and leadership development.

Following the background through Chapter 5, Chapters 6 through 13 provide the case study of the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission. Chapter 6 introduces the case study, provides the history of the FFLM and some of its challenges with cultural issues and language, and leadership expanding in a multi-cultural area.

Chapters 7 through 9 include the active missionaries in service in the mission as they proclaim the gospel, restoring an ancient church in modern times. Organizing their narratives into three parts, Chapter 7 includes their predisposing backgrounds, lineages, and motivations for service. In Chapter 8, the young men and women discuss their active missionary work in the FFLM and the challenges in a multi-cultural area, after which changes in the missionary corps are assessed. In Chapter 9, I participate as an ‘investigator’ sitting for the Preach My Gospel missionary lessons to better understand what they are teaching as missionaries. This chapter concludes with their anticipations of LDS adulthood.

Chapters 10 through 13 consider ‘perfecting the saints.’ These oral histories of returned missionaries are arranged in a tri-part scheme including their predisposing backgrounds, lineages, and motivations for service in Chapter 10. In Chapter 11, they recall their missionary service in the Americas, where they ‘pioneered’ new

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4 The term pioneer has specific salience in Mormonism as any person who helps originate a new area of the church, recalling the “pioneer company” led by Brigham Young to the Great Salt Lake Basin arriving July 24, 1847; the early settlers of the American west and those who continued Mormon colonies in Mexico and Canada; and finally, “people first converted to Mormonism in any state or country, who establish the foundation for Church growth there” (Bitton and Alexander 2008:173). “Pioneer Day” in Utah, celebrated on July 24, is said to be more popular than the Fourth of July.
congregations, and recruited among ‘Lamanites’ and Catholics, encountering cultural, retention, and leadership challenges.

The returned missionaries share their post-mission lives in Chapters 12 and 13. Chapter 12 considers perfecting their families in everyday Mormon life, Family Home Evening, and their raising the next generation of missionaries, perpetuating their missionary lineages. Chapter 13 includes their post-mission lives as leaders who are responsible for perfecting the saints in their stakes. The leaders grapple with language accommodations and leadership development amidst constant demographic and ecclesiastical change. The numerical growth and spiritual maturation of an area yields the pinnacle of Mormonism – a temple was announced to be built in Fort Lauderdale, which comprises a future study on temple work as the third pillar of the three-fold mission. The study ends with concluding remarks on the unique way the Latter-day saints employ the ancient Hebraic model of covenant as their religious structural identity, and mobilize their vast missionary apparatus by making and keeping covenants in the three-fold mission.
CHAPTER 2
SITUATING MORMON MISSION

President Gordon B. Hinckley, the Prophet, Seer and Revelator of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, died today, January 27, 2008, just as another round of fieldwork for this project commenced.¹ Like many of my research participants, President Hinckley, the fourteenth successor to Joseph Smith, Jr., was the only Mormon prophet and president I had followed. He had presided at the head of the church since I began my studies in 2002. The Fort Lauderdale Stake President and I shared these missives by email:²

Dear President and family,

I am so sorry to hear of President Hinckley's passing away yesterday. I offer my sympathy to all of you who experienced his love and leadership through his many vigorous years. Although a great loss, a natural event in the Heavenly Father's plan, I know the saints are joyous at having had such a great Prophet and President. He was quite an inspiration for the entire world and will be very much missed by so many.

My best regards,

Gayle

Gayle,

Thanks for your kind words. We were grateful the Lord took him so quickly and peacefully. Particularly we are grateful to see his sacrifice accepted and to see him finally reunited with his beloved wife. What an awesome leader he is. Our prayers are for his family and for Thomas Monson who must be feeling an overwhelming responsibility right now.

[President]

¹ Field note transcription dated January 27, 2008.
Saddened at President Hinckley’s passing, I had felt much the same at the passing of Pope John Paul II. Political differences notwithstanding, I felt great admiration for the purpose and meaning within their respective religions both men lived their lives. We Catholics grieve the passing of a pope with hopeful anticipation at the election of the next pope, but there is no such suspense during the Mormon interregnum. In an orderly, professional and seemingly bureaucratic order to the highest of spiritual matters, there would be no politicking, lobbying or jockeying for ecclesiastical position; no white smoke, no “Habemus Papam!” In the sacred transition of power that would follow, the rituals confirming leadership “gave symbolic expression to the hierarchical authority of the church’s Melchizedek priesthood and to the church’s multigenerational family culture” (Hammarberg 2008:43) and its growing internationalism.

In a matter of days, by February 3, 2002, Pres. Hinckley’s first counselor and next in line for the presidency, Thomas S. Monson, was set apart as the new prophet. In logical succession, the second counselor to Pres. Hinckley Henry B. Eyring moved up to become Pres. Monson’s first counselor. The open position of second counselor to the First Presidency, to be chosen from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, generated a source of excitement and anticipation, and the new prophet did not disappoint. Naming as his second counselor a native German born in Czechoslovakia, Dieter F. Uchtdorf was the only non-American in the Twelve.

The following April, the general membership of the worldwide church sustained, or upheld, the new First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve during the 178th General Conference of the church. Of these top fifteen positions in the church, eleven
authorities were born in the area known as the “Mormon culture region” (O’Dea 1957; Meinig 1965; Yorgason 2003), ten in Utah and one in Idaho; one each from California considered in the ‘Mormon corridor’ and rounded out with one from New York and New Jersey, in addition to Pres. Uchtdorf (Church Almanac 2009:34-43). Casual conversations with members at the General Conference\(^3\) suggested that given the overwhelming majority of eligible men for this vacant position are American, the choice of an Eastern European to the highest ranks of Mormonism serves as a signal of the church’s intentional internationalism, a presence for good on the world stage.

President Uchtdorf wrote his inaugural “First Presidency Message” for the popular LDS magazines Ensign and Liahona (2008a), just shortly after his sustaining. He instructs the “truly universal” church to “heed the voice of the prophets” through whom God speaks in a world filled with chaos, tension, and uncertainties. Since Joseph Smith, in an unbroken line of prophetic succession, the prophets have never failed as messengers of God’s truth, uniting their diverse, universal family:

I have no ancestors among the nineteenth-century pioneers. However, since the first days of my church membership, I have felt a close kinship to those early pioneers who crossed the plains. They are my spiritual ancestry, as they are for each and every member of the church, regardless of nationality, language, or culture. They established not only a safe place in the West but also a spiritual foundation for the building of the kingdom of God in all the nations of the world. As the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is now being embraced around the world, we are all pioneers in our own sphere and circumstance (Uchtdorf 2008a).

\(^3\) The General Conferences of the church, which are convened twice annually, are a treasure trove of primary documents all of which are web available within days and published, along with many other articles and stories on Mormon life, the following month in the popular LDS magazines Ensign and Liahona, the international version of Ensign. These sources together provide a rich and vast resource of LDS teachings and thought, and LDS life. See Shepherd and Shepherd (1984) for evolving themes in Mormon prophetic rhetoric, which highlights the importance to the Latter-day Saints the teachings of their leaders.
The missionary work of the internationalization of the church made possible President Uchtdorf’s family conversion in 1947 Germany. Today the church is present in 185 countries where in 340 missions, including the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission, over 52,000 full-time missionaries voluntarily labor in obligatory missionary callings (Church Almanac 2012:5). In sum, more than one million missionaries have been called in the 180 years of this final dispensation (Stahle 2007).

Among those million, the late President Hinckley served a proselytizing mission as have eight current apostles. “Historically, the majority of Mormonism’s most prominent officials have commenced their advancement through the ecclesiastical ranks after completing a period of missionary labor” (Shepherd and Shepherd 1998:xii). Missionary service in the LDS Church is considered a “central concern” since its founding and as such, “the study of missions and missionary work is an essential area for students of Latter-day Saint history” not only for its success in converting souls, but because of the revitalizing effect new converts and missionaries have on the church (Whittaker 2000:1). But although from the beginning the engine of growth is its mission, “the lifeblood of the church” (Andersen 1986), the study of Mormon mission is less attended to (Mauss 2001:175). Considering how “important and formative” mission service is in the LDS Church, there is little published scholarship on the missionary enterprise (Allen, Walker, and Whittaker 2000:175).

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5 Another seven apostles served in the military; while at war, missions dropped off in favor of the war effort, the national priority. Three men were in service during World War II and five during the Cold War. Presidents Monson, Eyring and Uchtdorf, all served military missions; Apostle L. Tom Perry served both a military and proselytizing mission (Church Almanac 2012:52-61). For Mormons, service in the military is an honorable and patriotic duty and is considered the most worthy substitute for serving missionary callings.
Despite a large literature in Mormon studies, there are only a few published case studies of local congregations and missions, and missionaries in the Americas. These include a history of Sugar House Ward, the oldest continuous ward in Mormonism (Shipps, May, and May 1994), a descriptive ethnography of the Delaware Elkton Ward (Taber 1993), an ethnography of “de facto congregationalism” in a Mormon ward (Phillips 2008); a lay history of the Los Angeles Stake, the oldest Spanish-speaking stake in the United States (Orton 1987); the historical development of the South American Missions written by its former president (Williams and Williams 1987) and reconsidered in a doctoral dissertation (Martins 1996). There are a few studies of Mormon missionaries’ and returned missionaries (Chadwick, Top, and McClendon 2010; Embry 1997; Knowlton 1994; McClendon and Chadwick 2004; Parry 1994; Olsen 1992; Shepherd and Shepherd 1995, 1998; Wilson 1994).


However, a study of mission directs one to the large literature on Christian missiology where a problem becomes immediately apparent. Missiology, which might at first glance appear to be a study of the logic of missions, is also scholarship grounded in Christian theology. To the extent missiological studies comport to theoretical
constructs they are embedded in Christian theological positions that assume mission Dei, or God’s mission in the world. While Mormons share an assumption that God’s mission is a ‘given’ in the world, neither recognizes the other as legitimate Christians. Since Joseph Smith and the founding, there has existed a cleavage between Christianity (which views Mormonism as heresy) and Mormonism (which views Christianity as apostate), yielding almost no interface between Christian and Mormon mission in the literature. There is one overview of Mormon missiology, which is the only article on Mormon missiology published in the Christian missiology literature (Britsch 1979). Further, in the major journal on the social science of missions, Social Sciences and Missions, there are no entries on the Latter-day Saint tradition. The Mormons are operating largely under the radar of mission studies.

This case study adds to the social scientific and Mormon studies literature as that of an operating mission in a multi-cultural gateway metropolis, with its active missionaries embedded, and its stakes’ leadership attended by returned missionaries and converts. I offer this case study in the lives of Latter-day Saints who serve missions

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6 In an email inquiry dated May 20, 2008 to the American Society of Missiology (ASM) list serve housed at Yale University, I asked about any possible connections or interface between Christian mission (broadly understood at that time as Roman Catholic and Protestant) and Mormon mission. I received one response from a former ASM officer (1988-189) recalling that R. Lanier Britsch of BYU had been a member for perhaps one year. About the Christian and Mormon missiological interface, he went on to write, “I have to report that a number of ASM members were quite uneasy as to whether we should welcome LDS scholars into membership. This was not a matter of formal discussion and action. ASM was still a relatively young scholarly society and perhaps this is indicative of our own insecurity at that early stage. It has always seemed to me that we missed an opportunity to engage in dialogue about our respective visions of missiology and mission. Beyond that, I am not aware of scholarly interactions either in face-to-face meetings or in scholarly journals between Mormon and mainstream Christian missiologists.” (Email dated May 20, 2008 in possession of the author.) With no existing conversation between these two mission traditions in the literature, a comparative mission study will be held for a later date.
and lead their congregations in a vibrant Mormon mission in the Americas, the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission.

The missionary experience is both “reality and archetype” as “the paradigmatic shaping experience of Mormon society” (Shepherd and Shepherd 1998:ix). The “paradigmatic shaping of Mormon society” is also to say a framework (archetype) for a society or a people (reality). What is the framework and its relationship to mission? And who constitutes this people? As they expand internationally, and specifically, in the Americas where Mormonism was founded and has grown exponentially, who are Mormons? Why, in fact, is an indigenous Anglo American church expanding among peoples in and from Latin America and the Caribbean? The simple answer is: missionaries. Missionaries export this America church. Nearly two centuries later, missionaries are still the engine of growth; more missionaries yield more converts (Hepworth 1999; Shepherd and Shepherd 1996)

An Ancient Church in a Modern World

The growth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been remarkable since World War II when the missionary corps were dramatically expanded under the Presidency of David O. McKay (Prince and Wright 2005). A massive global force\(^7\) that numbers over 52,000 missionaries in 340 missions worldwide demonstrates most of its growth in the Americas (Church Almanac 2012:4-5). This missionary enterprise drives what is for Rodney Stark (1984) the first “new world religion” since Islam; for Jan Shipps (1987) “a new religious tradition” in the Abrahamic tradition; for

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\(^7\) As of October 6, 2012 during the Semi-annual General Conference, Prophet and President Thomas S. Monson announced during the lowering of age eligibility for missionary service. Women are now eligible at age nineteen rather than twenty-one and men may now serve at age eighteen instead of nineteen. This change will dramatically increase the missionary corps.
Douglas Davies (2003) Mormonism is a “global religion” that under globalization inserts itself into as many nations as possible; for Rick Phillips it is a “North American church with contingents in other continents” (2006:52-53); and for Harold Bloom, Mormonism is a quintessential American religion with “titanic designs” on the world (1982:94). For Armand Mauss, the most accurate depiction is that Mormonism is “almost entirely a Western Hemisphere church” (2008:313). Although Latter-day Saints intend to convert the entire world, their project realizes its eschatological purposes in the Americas, where it was founded and where Jesus Christ will rule in the millennium, along with Jerusalem. Throughout the Americas and beyond, missionaries labor to restore the ancient Christian church in modern times.

Jan Shipps (1987) demonstrates that the emergence of Mormonism was no ordinary restoration of primitive Christianity in nineteenth century America. Instead, Mormons understand themselves as the restoration of primitive apostolic Christianity fulfilling “Hebrew law and prophecy” through the “life and death of Jesus Christ” (54). “There is no more pervasive and unifying theme to the Jewish scriptures than the covenant made with Abraham. It is the basis of both collective and individual identity” (Givens 2009:32). This ancient appropriation of Hebrew identity in contemporary times is demonstrated at Temple Square. There is perhaps no more visible and important monument to the Mormon understanding of their “covenant restored” than that of the

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8 Mormonism is not the only restoration movement in the United States. See Richard Hughes (1988) The American Quest for the Primitive Church. Shipps writes, “Mormonism’s understanding of itself as the (not “a”) restoration proceeded from the assumption that restoration could and would come about when and only when direct communication between humanity and divinity was reopened” (1988:183). Because of this revelation history, Mormonism claims to the only true Christian church, and does not claim any of traditional Christianity as its own. But because it emerged in nineteenth century North America it was influenced by other Christian theologies including Puritanism or Calvinism (Alexander 1987; Arrington 1958; Cooper 1990; Leone 1979; McMurrin 1965).
permanent exhibition at the Museum of Church History and Art. “Funded, designed, and constructed entirely by members of the church, “A Covenant Restored” reflects current internal thinking about Mormon identity” (McDannell 1990:950).

The ancient Israelite story is the archetypal covenant between Abraham on behalf of his family lineage and God. As revealed to Abraham, in exchange for faithfulness to the One God, Abraham received the Melchizedek priesthood and was chosen along with his numberless progeny to be God’s people, protected within a promised land, his lineage a light for all nations (Rasmussen 1992:9-10). For their part as recorded in Genesis 15 and 17,\(^9\) Abraham and his children were to mark their flesh by circumcision with the sign of the covenant through all ages as a demonstration of obedience. Reiterated in Deuteronomy 7, God added he would keep “his covenant faithfully to the thousandth generation” but instantly bring to “destruction those who reject him” (Frymer-Kensky 2001:23). This “vertical” covenant was specifically between one man and his family and their relationship with God (Ludlow 2000). It was not yet a universal covenant, as would later be promulgated by Paul to the Galatians, which would only be realized in Mormonism (Mauss 2003:36) since all other Christian traditions are apostate.

In Christianity, the conceptualization of covenant moves from a covenant of blood to a covenant of adoption (Givens 2009:31). Considering themselves fully Christian and the one true Christianity, Mormons believe they have the only restoration project that includes the entirety of the Hebraic prophecy fulfilled. The fulfillment of prophecy meant the appearance of a new prophet in modern times. Chosen a prophet of God in the final

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\(^9\) All references to the Christian Bible are taken from the *King James Bible Online*, Pure Cambridge Edition.
dispensation, Joseph Smith was in an “unbroken line of fulfilled prophecy” from Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, through Revelation to Joseph Smith and beyond” (Shipps 1988:183; italics in the original). “Membership in latter-day covenant Israel, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is not limited to a certain lineage but is open to all who willingly accept and abide by its covenantal terms through the law of adoption. Latter-day Saints accept God’s covenant with Abraham and his lineage, a covenant reestablished in the time of Joseph Smith,” which is known as the “new and everlasting covenant” (Mayfield 1992:331) and includes all the ordinances of the “fulness of the gospel” administered through the authority of the only authentic priesthood.

A LDS Covenant Theology

Joseph Smith’s 1820 First Vision and revelation instructed him that all the existing churches were in error. Further, a Great Apostasy had occurred after the passing of the apostles, negating an approximate 1,400 years of Christianity, and along with it, Christian mission. A subsequent and first revelation on missionary work was received in February 1829, even before the founding of the church and the publication of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon’s title page makes clear that it is brought forth first to the Lamanites as a descendants of the house of Israel and to the Jews and the Gentiles. By 1831, in response to “false reports and foolish stories” that discouraged people from learning about the religion, Joseph Smith received a revelation to bring the saints joy and encouragement. “And even so I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people, and for the Gentiles to seek to it, and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me” (Doctrines & Covenants 45:9). Another missionary revelation was recorded in October 1831.
Verily, I say unto you, blessed are you for receiving mine everlasting covenant, even the fulness of my gospel, sent forth unto the children of men, that they might have life . . . it is my will that you should proclaim my gospel from land to land, and from city to city, yea, in those regions round about where it has not been proclaimed. . . . bear testimony in every place, unto every people and in their synagogues, reasoning with the people (Doctrines & Covenants 66: 2, 5, 7).

With the revelation of the Book of Mormon and its history of the ancient Israelites in the Americas, it became clear to Joseph Smith that his mission was to restore ancient Christianity, gather all of Israel back into the covenant, and resume Paul’s missionary work. In this final dispensation, Mormons take this covenant restoration quite literally; it is indeed the ancient covenant that is restored as the “new and everlasting covenant” as “central” to Joseph Smith’s theology (Alexander 1987:44).

In Mormon theology, remembrance and enactment of the promises among God’s people are key.

Mormon theology has always stressed that salvation and exaltation come, at least in part, as a result of promises made to groups – the seed of Abraham or the house of Israel, for example – and are contingent upon the realization of social, group-oriented goals which are strongly reminiscent of many aspects of Old Testament theology (Sondrup 1981:212).

Covenants of remembrance, covenants of land, covenants of prophecy, covenants as vows, covenant-making rituals, and covenants universal all find expression in Book of Mormon teachings (Peterson 2001:37-56). In Mormonism, conveyance of these covenants is dependent upon the threefold mission of the church. Among the “vertical” covenants, historical remembrance is fundamental to a God of salvation history (Ludlow 2000). If the chosen people forget, as did the first-generation Christians, then the covenant is lost. God’s promise of a land of inheritance for his chosen people is interconnected with remembrance. The covenant of prophecy assures that the prophets remind God’s people of their sacred destiny, foretelling of things to come.
Remembrance, a promised land, prophecy, and the priesthood are embedded in the Abrahamic covenant restored.

Additionally, the vertical promises with God may extend “horizontally” from humans to one another (Ludlow 2000). Personal vows or promises are made between individuals and God and between individuals in families, within stake communities, and temples. Covenant-making such as undergoing the ordinance of baptism has lateral implications for the covenant community, for this is how it grows, and ultimately becomes a universal covenant. Temple marriages with children born into the covenant extend blessings to the community and increase lineages. Temple work for the dead extends horizontally into the past to gather all loved ones into the covenant, for a reunion in the cosmic future. Through Sabbath sacrament services, Mormons renew their baptismal covenants as they join together in the communion of bread and water, remembering the Lord’s saving work (Peterson 2001:43; Reynolds 2005). Together, through these expressions of covenant, all people are invited to come unto Christ, into the covenant of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. By accepting the covenant and living faithfully every day keeping covenants, each person is made worthy and contributes to the covenant community of God.

**Mission as a Covenant Imperative**

The Mormons understand the restoration of the covenant to be the new and everlasting covenant which is to say, in this dispensation Abraham’s covenant is restored to a new ‘chosen people.’ In fact, in Mormonism all dispensations’ covenants are restored, which they must spread around the world. Each of the prior six dispensations possessed the original church of Jesus Christ with its covenants and saving ordinances, from Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, through the apostles of
Jesus, until their successive apostasies, or breaking of the covenant. After every dispensation’s apostasy, it is necessary for God to renew his covenant with his chosen people in the next dispensation.

Where the first-generation Christians failed in the covenant was in forgetting their end of the bargain to be obedient to God’s commandments (Reynolds 2005). For Reynolds, in replacing the covenant ordinances of repentance, baptism, confirmation, priesthood, and marriage with sacraments of grace unconditionally conferred, the early Christians stripped the individual and covenant community of its obedience and repentant responsibility toward God, and fundamentally changed their relationship with God. 10 If grace and salvation were unconditional, then no covenantal obedience was reciprocally required and the covenant was broken. “Implicit in the idea of a restoration of the gospel through Joseph Smith was the concept that the old covenant had been broken and that a new covenant was necessary” (Alexander 1987:43-44).

While God has not forgotten Abraham’s progeny, God found it necessary in this final dispensation to call a new chosen people to spread the message of his son, Jesus Christ. Standing beside Abraham’s children of Judah, Mormons understand themselves to be in the Hebraic lineage of Joseph through Ephraim (Mauss 2003) where in the Americas, his lineage is believed to be responsible for conducting the work of mission (Brown 1992:706).

Upon his resurrection visit to Jerusalem, Jesus issued the Great Commission to make universal his covenant – mission was a covenant imperative. It was up to Paul and Barnabas, as the first pair of Christian missionaries, to universalize the particular

10 Reynolds’s chapter also argues that the loss of covenants and their attendant ordinances preceded the Hellenization of early Christianity, long thought by the LDS to be a major cause of the great apostasy.
Jewish covenant throughout the ancient world. According to Mormon teachings, upon the Great Apostasy, the authentic church of Jesus Christ was removed from the earth, and along with it the gift of prophecy, all of the covenants, the gospel, the authority of the priesthood, and mission legitimacy. What continued as Christianity was fourteen hundred years of false teachings, resulting in thousands of schisms, none of which Mormons claim in their lineage.

According to the Book of Mormon, Jesus’ subsequent visitation to the descendants of ancient Israelites in the Americas resulted in three discourses on restoration of the new covenant which, through his atonement, was now available to all of humanity (Ludlow 2000). The new scripture revealed to Joseph Smith with the ancient record of the Americas “is the sacred expression of Christ’s great last covenant with mankind. It is a new covenant, a new testament from the New World to the entire world” (Holland 1997:351). It is the culmination of salvation history. This final restoration of the new and everlasting covenant, in anticipation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, resumes the gift of prophecy, the covenants and associated ordinances of the gospel, administered through the authority of the priesthood and promulgated through the legitimate mission of the church.

Together the revelations to Joseph Smith bring forth a new everlasting covenant church with its mission imperative to proclaim the gospel to the entire world. “When we come into the Church, we covenant in the waters of baptism that we will do missionary work. We enter into a solemn contract with Deity that we will bear testimony of the restoration of the gospel on every appropriate occasion” (Tripp 1973: 18). “This mission of ours is to all [of] the world,” taking with them the Book of Mormon as evidence of the
restoration in the Americas. In this final dispensation, to help his people “remember their promises to him—and certainly to help them remember his promises to them—God has directed that the nature and significance of those covenants be recorded” in the Book of Mormon (Holland 1997:7). “Missionary work began again when the Lord’s Church was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith” (Chapter 33, Gospel Principles 2009:189).

President Gordon B. Hinckley took up this very theme speaking at a special Missionary Meeting in Hong Kong on the eve of the temple dedication, in 1996. Instructing on the relationship of the LDS to Abraham, his words provide an understanding of the purpose of missionary work: conversion into the covenant, irrespective of ethnicity, and the covenant making required of members. Although this message was delivered in Hong Kong, its importance resonates for LDS in mission everywhere, including in the FFLM, a microcosm of the Americas, where there are peoples of Lamanite, Catholic, and Mormon descent among nearly one billion potential hemispheric converts of all ethnicities, any of whom is eligible for adoption in the Abrahamic lineage. This prophet’s comments are necessary in full length because they capture, for his people, the Mormon understanding of the covenant.

What is the covenant? It is the covenant between Jehovah and Abraham—and subsequently with Isaac and Jacob, but primarily with Abraham—that through him and his seed all nations of the earth might be blessed and that Jehovah would be their God and they would be His people. . . . And one of the purposes of the Restoration of this gospel is that this covenant might be reaffirmed in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times. People used to argue here as to whether the Chinese were literal descendants of Israel. I said I do not worry about that. Whether they get their blessings by inherited birthright or whether they receive them by adoption [conversion baptism], the end result is the same . . . . Now then, every baptism that you perform places someone under covenant—again this eternal and everlasting covenant, a special relationship with God, our Eternal Father, and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Every time we partake of the
[Sunday] sacrament, we renew that covenant, we take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ and contract, as it were, with Him to keep His commandments. He in turn says that His Spirit will be with us. That is a covenant, a two-party contract. Now, we have built this temple and are dedicating it tomorrow. That is a place of covenants also. We are a covenant people in a special relationship with God, our Eternal Father—eternal and everlasting if we live worth of it. In that house of the Lord, as all of you know who have been to a temple, we take upon ourselves covenants and obligations regarding lives of purity and virtue and goodness and truth and unselfishness to others (Hinckley 2005:332-333).

President Hinckley’s words must have come as a welcome solace, simplifying for the saints how to reconcile multiple ethnicities into one in Christ.

A ‘Peculiar People’

In the model and lineage of Joseph Smith, most LDS reckon their lineage to Israel in two ways: as disclosed in their patriarchal blessings to the “tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh” the grandsons of the patriarch Jacob, or by lineal descent or by spiritual descent (adoptive baptism) (Mauss 2003:29). “The Lord has revealed that it is the particular responsibility of Israel to carry the message of the restored gospel to the world, and Ephraim has the responsibility of directing this [mission] work” (Brown 1992:706).

It is through adoption (conversion and baptism) into the covenant that a particular understanding of covenant is universalized. In a very brief look at these questions Thomas O’Dea’s (1957) seminal work on the Utah Mormons considers them an ethnicity, or “near-nation” of Anglo European stock (202). Armand Mauss (1994), a Mormon, along with LDS historians Davis Bitton and Leonard Arrington (1992), consider Mormons an American “subculture.” Jan Shipps says Mormons are like first century Christians in that as the early Christians “thought they had found the only proper way to be Jews” (1987: ix), so did the Mormons think they had found the only proper way to be Christians. Her more recent work calls them a “religio-ethnic community” (Shipps
Perhaps most significantly, the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups (Thernstrom, Orlov, and Handlin 1980) lists them as an American ethnicity.

Rex Cooper’s (1990) study of “Mormon covenant organization” demonstrates the Book of Mormon’s covenantal promises as the basis for early Mormon social cohesion during the first fifty years. After the Nauvoo period (1838-1846), this social structure adapted into what he calls the “patriarchal order” based on cumulative theological innovations including the full flower of temple rituals, baptisms for the dead, temple endowments, eternal marriage, and more esoteric and highly secret orders of elite men known as the Holy Order, and others. Most clandestinely of all was the early and incremental institution of plural marriage, which in some cases worked against solidarity. Nevertheless, plural marriage was a covenant feature until the 1890 Manifesto, after which it was practiced underground necessitating a second prophetic announcement in 1904 threatening excommunication for recalcitrant practitioners. During this time temple sealings were expanded, encouraging LDS to “trace their genealogies as far as they can” sealing lineages in the temple. “Have children sealed to their parents, and run this chain through as far as you can get it. When you get to the end, let the last man be adopted to Joseph Smith, who stands at the head of this dispensation. This is the will of the Lord to this people” (Cooper 1990:198).

However, the post-Manifesto transformation of Mormonism into a contemporary church changed the major components of the economic and marriage systems. The secret societies were phased out, and in 1978 the prohibition against Black men in the priesthood was lifted (Cooper 1990:203). For Cooper, the residuals of the patriarchal order are found within families where the male priesthood holder is at the head of the
family. Whether or not a patriarchal order can persist into contemporary Mormonism depends on: solidarity within increasing diversity; fundamentalist radicalism; inclusion of non-normative families; and egalitarianism and women’s subordination (203). In this study, the topics of interest are solidarity within a rapidly diversifying membership and women’s subordination. But as this study will show, Mormons do not necessarily see themselves as belonging any longer to a patriarchal order where women are subordinate to men, irrespective of the all-male priesthood. Further, this research demonstrates how people of all ethnicities are acculturated into the Mormon covenant identity as a “master status” (Shepherd and Shepherd 2001) through the work of the missionaries who Cooper does not attend to. Moreover, this study is explicitly attendant to the lateral nature of the covenants, as well as the vertical covenant with God. These topics are taken up again in the second part of this study.

Because Mormons are global proselytizers incorporating people of all ethnicities, cultures, and languages into their religious group, it is problematic to call Mormons an ethnic group, despite the parallels they invite with the Jews (Mauss 1994:64-66). Further, as happens in other religions, the degrees of praxis will determine, at least in Mormon eyes, if or not they remain as insiders. Some Mormons who are non- or less observant may call themselves “cultural Mormons” or “ethnic Mormons” (White 2008: 30-40). “Yet the rhetoric of ethnicity and related concepts still has its uses in serving the needs of the Mormon church leaders, intellectuals, and even grass-roots members in their efforts to assert a special Mormon identity despite the manifest [American] assimilation” (Mauss 1994:73). Givens writes, “This construction of ethnicity does, it is true, facilitate the Mormon project of self-definition as a covenant people” even as their
differentiation renders them variously vulnerable and marginalized (1997:18). Indeed, participants in both studies have referred to themselves as a “peculiar people.” The designation of “peculiar people” refers to “the Lord’s people (Ex. 19:6; Deut. 7:6; 14:1; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9)” who, despite the world, keep all their covenants (McConkie 1966:565).

In constructing a Mormon identity, it is helpful to use concentric circles (Peterson 1997), where the sacred canopy of Mormonism is very large, but with a core or nucleus of committed active members who carry forth all the church programs and keep all the covenants. Davies calls this group a “church within a church” (2000:4). At the furthest circle, a Mormon can end up a worldly apostate. Mormon students are taught to discern those who fall inside as opposed to those who fall outside:

There is no fence around Zion or the world, but to one of discernment, they are separated more completely than if each were surrounded with high unscalable walls. Their underlying concepts, philosophies, and purposes are at complete variance one with the other. The philosophy of the world is self-sufficient, egotistical, materialistic, and skeptical. The philosophy of Zion is humility, not servility, but a willing recognition of the sovereignty of God and dependence on his providence (Institute: Doctrines & Covenants Student Manual 2001:369).

The reality is not quite that simple as will be taken up again in the discussion of revelation later. However, any person adopted into the covenant can be within that nucleus of people who serve missions and callings, provide leadership in stakes and raise families, and vicariously baptize their dead. It is only a ‘matter of agency,’ as Mormons are keen to say. These are the ‘active Mormons’ in this research, who model exemplary behavior in missions and in stake leadership, as will be shown later in this study.
Theoretical Framework

In this project the new and everlasting covenant revealed to Joseph Smith functions as the sacred canopy (Berger 1967) restored. Like Abraham of old, this transcendent covenant revealed to his new people serves as a vertical covenant. The sacred covenant requires reciprocal covenants. The three-fold mission of the church is the method by which Mormon make reciprocal covenants, and coincides with the plausibility structures: in missions they proclaim the gospel; in stakes they perfect the saints; and in the temple they redeem the dead. These three institutional structures are the loci of reciprocal covenant-making in individual, family, and collective response to God’s revelation of the new and everlasting covenant to Joseph Smith. Every covenant made perpetuates the “lineages of belief” in a “chain of collective memory” (Hervieu-Léger 2000). These reciprocal covenants are obedient to God and lateral with one another. God, in his sole discretion, chooses a people and initiates the covenant, the solemn agreement. In return, the chosen people covenant to keep God’s conditions. “Covenants can and should be stimulating, motivational, and indeed a most stabilizing influence among men” (Tripp 1973:1). Ideally, by inviting new people into the covenant, new lineages of belief are begun in new Mormon families. In these promises the Mormons will not fail. The repeated disobedience of the covenant peoples of old has plagued the entire salvation history. That the Mormons not fail in their reciprocal covenant obligations in this final dispensation has implications for mission and the internationalization of the church, which will be demonstrated later in the case study.

Sacred Canopy

Peter Berger’s (1967) sacred canopy remains a meaningful model in the sociology of religion for understanding the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
as a refuge from a chaotic world. The sacred canopy – the ‘nomos,’ an ordered and meaningful universe – is a covenant model given by continuing revelation from the Heavenly Father to the earthly Prophet on behalf of God’s chosen people. The revelation imparted to Joseph Smith, Jr. is of the original and eternal covenant church of Jesus Christ restored, is supported by plausibility structures of mission, stake communities, and temple. “We speak of the church as our refuge, our defense. There is safety and protection in the church” (Packer 2006).

Berger’s sacred canopy is an ideal type construct for the covenant that promotes structural and functional boundaries for the community. Further, within the structure Mormon mission is mobilized as a plausibility structure as Mormons undertake activities to proclaim the gospel, perfect themselves, and redeem the dead across the cosmos. The restoration of this revealed covenant provides the LDS with the sacred knowledge they need to build their institutions. Berger’s theory follows from his classical sociology with Thomas Luckmann (1966) on the social construction of knowledge, as the “relationship between human thought and the social conditions under which it occurs” (Berger 1970:34). So too is religion, as a social construction of knowledge, a product of the relationship between human thought and social conditions, and a historical product of culture.

Insofar as humans engage in world-building and world-maintenance through the construction of social knowledge, so too do they build and maintain a religious world, external to themselves, which becomes objectified, and in turn, imposes a sacred and meaningful order that is internalized by humans and take-for-granted, or as given. Berger argues that the meaningful order, or “nomos,” is the sacred order imposed by
religion on social structure. Created and sacralized by humans within which they build and maintain their world, a canopy of meaning and order protects them from a precarious and tenuous cosmos. Insofar as the order maintains meaning and protection, it is self-legitimating. Because religion serves to legitimate the social order, it is a powerful force when faced with chaos. The pillars of knowledge that support this metaphorical framework are what Berger calls “plausibility structures” – those notions that make credible the reality upon which the sacred canopy rests; those ideas that are recapitulated in the community validating their plausibility.

In this chapter, I argue that the sacred canopy is helpful for understanding the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For Mormons, they are under a sacred canopy, or a covenant that was revealed to Joseph Smith, that makes orderly and meaningful their cosmos, as were the ancient Israelites. As ancient Israel was protected by God if it faithfully upheld his laws so too is the “New Zion” protected as the restoration and fulfillment of Israel through restored Christianity (Shipps 1987:75). In both cases, the respective prophets, Abraham and Joseph Smith, Jr., were subject to a hierophany that revealed God’s covenant intentions. The divine breaking into human history was that fundamental moment of religious experience for both men. The transmissions of these experiences set in motion the building of God’s Kingdom by the chosen people under the sacred covenant in both dispensations. Because the descendants of Abraham through the apostolic Christians failed to carry out God’s sacred plan, the Latter-day Saints understand it is their ultimate responsibility to replicate the primitive church, building and maintaining God’s kingdom on earth through
the new and everlasting covenant (Clark 1992:1008-1009). For Mormons, as it is in heaven, so it is on earth.

The plausibility structure of the congregational stake is taken from the idea of Isaiah’s tent, which Mormons believe prophesied. The Latter-day Saints are continually encouraged by their leaders to ‘strengthen the stakes of Zion’ to uphold Isaiah’s tent, or canopy. For Berger, the sacred canopy of religion serves as an all-encompassing tent over the entire social matrix, providing protection, order, stability, and boundaries, all of which are institutionalized as legitimate. This idea of a sacred canopy resonates with Mormon imagery from Isaiah’s prophecy: “Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and they seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee” (54:2, 3, 7). These “tents” come to prophetic fulfillment in what Mormons call their ecclesiastical ‘stakes’ or dioceses.

Critiques of the sacred canopy are that it is too rigid, too hierarchical, and archaic or fossilized to accommodate modern religion that is competitive, entrepreneurial, and mobilized. Christian Smith (1998), studying evangelicals, uses subcultural identity theory to argue that where a sacred canopy is too “expansive, immobile, and held up by props beyond the reach of those covered” instead “sacred umbrellas” are portable, small, and hand-held – “like the faith-sustaining religious worlds that modern people construct for themselves” – a subcultural identity (106). While Leone suggests Mormons have a creedless “do-it-yourself theology” (1979:7), which might comport to
Smith’s model, Shepherd and Shepherd (1984:10-12) say emphatically that is this is not the case. Mormons are entirely subject to the authority of their General Authorities and leaders.

Subcultural identity theory allows for diversity within Christian identity; one can be Baptist and evangelical or not, Methodist and evangelical, and Lutheran and evangelical or not. But unlike the evangelicals who may belong to Protestant denominations or other Christians carrying the evangelical umbrella as an attachment to their affiliation, to be under the LDS canopy is to renounce other religions by conversion and baptism into Mormonism. One cannot be an evangelical and Mormon at the same time, due to mutually exclusive theological doctrines, not the least of which is the Trinity, and the necessity of a ‘born again’ conversion testimony. Further, Protestants and Catholics do not recognize Mormon baptisms, and the inverse is also true; Mormons rebaptize their converts from all denominations. In the LDS case, a solid, sturdy sacred cosmos is purposefully constructed, where the boundaries of belief and belonging are maintained and reinforced through authority. But there is flexibility and mobilization, even portability, in the three-fold mission enterprise that puts within their reach, or within their very hands, all the responsibility for building, maintaining, and mobilizing a Mormon world.

Wuthnow’s has conducted research that provides support for a sacred canopy of belief. A study of evangelical college students in which they maintain credibility or plausibility in a “defensive stance” against the world recalling Berger’s notion of community as a plausibility structure that protects them and their like-minded friends (1986:121-142). Wuthnow (1992) uses symbolic universes to study coherence in the
face suffering, death, meaning, and purpose. Wuthnow’s reading of Berger is more holistic than others. The sacred canopy “offered an argument that explained why religion (in one form or another) would continue to be discovered and rediscovered over and over again. It predicted that the sacred would remain a vital feature of modern times” (1992:34). In Wuthnow’s study (2006) of why America falls short of its potential to be a better nation, he opens with Berger’s concepts: “The deep narratives that shape our sense of national purpose and identity are so firmly inscribed in our culture that we usually accept them without thinking much about them” (2006:1).

Berger’s sacred canopy is a useful structural model for understanding the divine revelation of the covenant restoration to the Latter-day Saints. Berger’s meaningful order supported by the plausibility of mission, community, and narrative must necessarily be transportable. As God’s covenant people, the LDS are charged with taking the restoration model to the entire world. Through world-building and world-maintaining processes, the Latter-days Saints plant the church in foreign missions, raising up stakes in Zion, and extending the reach of Isaiah’s tent across the globe, and through temple work, to the entire cosmos. Through the three-fold mission, Mormons mobilize and proselytize, making and keeping covenants every day. Each covenant kept perpetuates their lineages of belief in a chain of collective memory that reaches to the ancient past and into the cosmic future, building the Mormon covenant community.

Chain of Memory

Daniele Hervieu-Léger (2000) considers how religious traditions’ narratives and rituals construct individual and institutional history, and individual and collective remembrance through generations. Modernity results in fragmentation: fragmented societies, communities, religions, families, and even fragmented identities. Hervieu-
Léger argues that in the case of secularizing Western Europe, modernization has caused the forgetting of the tradition in light of new and plausible explanations associated with science and humanism. Over time, people forget the faith of their fathers, and become what she calls “amnesic societies” (2000:ix).

Given such a context, the deliberate choice of invoking the authority of a tradition, by becoming incorporated into a continuing lineage, constitutes one possible, post-traditional way of constructing self-identity among others, all of which call upon an individuals’ affectivity and are fed on his or her search for community, and his or her memories and longings” (2000:165).

The salience and durability of a religious tradition is successful where practitioners have persisted in handing the narratives and rituals down through the generations. Religion is defined as “an ideological, practical and symbolic system through which consciousness, both individual and collective, of belonging to a particular chain of belief is constituted, maintained, developed and controlled” (Hervieu-Léger 2000:82). Her definition juxtaposes with Berger’s world-building and world-maintenance of a sacred canopy recapitulated through its plausibility structures. Every covenant remembered, every promise made and kept by an active Mormon recalls the tradition, reinforcing legitimacy and identity. Regarding religious memory,

the normativity of collective memory is reinforced by the fact of the group’s defining itself, objectively and subjectively, as a lineage of belief. And so its formation and reproductiveness spring entirely from the efforts of memory feeding this self-definition. At the source of all religious belief, as we have seen, there is belief in the continuity of the lineage of believers (Hervieu-Léger 2000:125; italics in the original).

Additionally, the success of such a tradition will be insured if it actively seeks out those people seeking to convert, or make “the deliberate choice of invoking the authority of a tradition,” and participate in “becoming incorporated into a continuing lineage” or a “chain of belief” (Hervieu-Léger 2000:165). In the Mormon understanding, their church
is in the Hebraic lineage from the covenant of Adam to Abraham to Joseph Smith. As the restoration of the ancient church of Jesus Christ, which has been absent to humanity (or forgotten) since the passing of the first generation of apostles, it is their covenant obligation to remind people through their missionary teachings that the new and everlasting covenant is a universal invitation. As God’s covenant people in this dispensation, Mormons restore and sustain the sacred narratives and ritual ordinances that are recalled and reenacted at all levels around the globe by modern means – proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the Saints, and redeeming the dead. Through their missionary efforts, they reconstruct the eternal church of Jesus Christ as a sacred canopy, beginning in the Americas, where the next testament of Jesus Christ takes place, recorded in the Book of Mormon. The LDS proselyting to indigenous peoples in the Americas is a process of recalling what was forgotten – that the restored gospel is their birthright, which their ancestors failed to remember for successive generations. In this way, Hervieu- Léger’s theory is not exclusive to modern societies but has utility for lost and restored traditions, such as the original church of Jesus Christ.

The Mormon sacred canopy of covenant is upheld by the three-fold mission: proclaim the gospel, perfect the saints, and redeem the dead, which are the three plausibility structures of mission, stakes, and temple, respectively. Within this structure there are dynamic flows of activity. Mormons make reciprocal covenants every time they enact mission service, work toward perfection, or do their ‘temple work’ for the dead. All of these activities recapitulate the chain of memory through their lineages of belief, which are passed down through the generations. New lineages of belief are established whenever an individual makes the deliberate choice to incorporate herself
into this sacred tradition by repentance and the baptismal covenant. The tradition is the beneficiary of God’s favor as a people chosen to restore for the final time in this dispensation his new and everlasting covenant.

Mormonism demonstrates in the sacred canopy features of the structural old paradigm in the sociology of religion. Simultaneously, as a modern religion born from the American pluralist social milieu it demonstrates some of the contours of the new paradigm in the sociology of religion. Perhaps this should not be surprising since Mormonism claims to be both; a restoration of all things ancient in modern times. As an ancient restoration project, it has structural features of the old paradigm (transcendent sacred canopy with hierarchical plausibility structures of belief, behavior, and belonging), and as a modern religion demonstrates the agency features of the new paradigm (rationalization, mobilization, conversion, and continual change).

Turning to the sociology of religion in Chapter 3, the state of the field is an ambiguous one. The new paradigm has enjoyed ascendance in the past two decades, especially among American scholars. Based on readings of American religious history, some sociologists have denied the secularization thesis of the old paradigm in favor of arguments that the American religious milieu has not secularized under modernity as has Europe. Therefore, explanations for religious ferment attributable to modern forces yield social pluralism and individual choice. Warner (1993) sets forth the comparative features of the two paradigms, which will be applied to Mormonism. Currently, scholars are rethinking these paradigms in light of persistent and differentiated secularization and the ongoing human search for meaning, as well as a critique of economic models applied to spiritual matters that are often unverifiable phenomena.
CHAPTER 3
THE OLD AND NEW PARADIGMS IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

In an attempt to capture the complexity of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its active members who are responsible for its worldwide church growth through the three-fold mission, this work includes the sociology of religion. The sociology of religion has been embroiled in debate over economic approaches to the study of religion – the new paradigm – since at least 1993 when R. Stephen Warner identified a "paradigm shift" from the old to the new, a shift that Scottish sociologist Steve Bruce calls “the malign influence of a small clique of US sociologists of religion” (1999:1). A consideration of Mormonism demonstrates applicability of both the old and the new paradigms in the sociology of religion.

The debate in the sociology of religion regarding the old paradigm attributed to Peter Berger and the new paradigm is first considered, not because economic theory as applied to the study of religion is preferable but because new paradigm studies are dominating the sociology of religion and have some utility. Old paradigm approaches are now considered demand-side theories, which employ microeconomic language to study what needs, desires, or demands people want from religion. Of the demand-side theories, the secularization thesis has prompted some of the most heated controversies, based on the assumption that modern, rational progress would inevitably lead to a decline in religion, with Europe as the paradigmatic case. Arguing that the opposite has happened in the United States, the new paradigm is focused on the supply-side, which is a religious market or competition model emphasizing the actions of church and state supplying religion to a competitive religious market. Assuming that the state provides an unconstrained social environment conducive to religious freedom and pluralism,
competition among religions (religious suppliers) will inevitably arise, from which rational actors can choose – hence, rational choice theory. One can expect religious ferment and mobilization under such conditions.

   After considering the debate between the paradigms within North Americanist, Latin Americanist, and hemispheric critiques, I will problematize the new paradigm and rational choice theory, and reassess these paradigms by including studies on the Latter-day Saints. While new paradigm proponents such as Stark seek to jettison the old paradigm for the new, many theorists are resisting throwing the baby out with the bath water – and there is good reason for resistance, which the Mormon case illuminates. Because Mormonism fits features of both the old and new paradigms, this raises a necessary reassessment of paradigms in light of Mormonism, which provides a bridge between sociology and phenomenology in the study of religion, and in this case, the Latter-day Saints.

**The Debate**

   The sociology of religion has long predicted that as a result of modernity and its Enlightenment project of capitalist democracy, science, rationalization and routinization, religion would necessarily decline into a private sphere of idiosyncratic belief and practice that would have little import in the larger world. Modern, rational people would simply decline to comport their lives to irrational religious dogmas and beliefs, so the conventional thinking went. One need only look at the decline of religion in Western Europe to find the secularization thesis model. However, in 1993, R. Stephen Warner identified a "paradigm shift in process" within the sociology of American religion (Warner 1993:1044). The old paradigm attributed to sociologist Peter Berger proved
increasingly inadequate to interpret anomalies of American religion, according to Warner, giving rise to new interpretive models (1046). Pursuant to the old paradigm in a pluralistic modernizing world, religion would diminish and become relegated to the private sphere as had happened in Western Europe – the secularization thesis. “By secularization we mean the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols” (Berger 1967:107). With the advance of modern thought, religious plausibility is predicted to diminish, except in the few extreme cases of “defiant traditionalism” (Berger 1970:21). Religious insistence upon supernaturalism would be "restricted to smaller groups, typically those whose social location (in “backward” regions, say, or in the lower classes) gives them little interest or stake in the world of modernity" (Warner 1993:1047). This expectation, however, does not comport with much of the diversity and ferment within the American religious experience, where religion is neither marginalized by particularisms nor relegated to the private sphere unfit for public consumption. "In its simplest form, the secularization paradigm claims that modernization results in the progressive decline of religion's social significance" (Vásquez and Marquardt 2003:13). Religion among the people has been little in decline throughout American history.

Secularization and American Religious History

This theoretical crisis was earlier argued as “ahistorical sociology” in which analysis of American religious history relied too heavily on sociological theories, paying insufficient attention to the history of social change, resulting in "no sociological interpretations of American religious history that are grounded in the data of social experience" (Hackett 1988:462-464). Thanks to a new generation of historians, American religious history has shifted from the Protestant, denominational, and studies
of an elite masculine clergy to ethnic and racial, gendered and laity, and new religious
movements (NRM) studies; additionally, religion within national and political, economic
and demographic changes has informed new scholarship (465). For Warner, the
growing interdisciplinary nexus of economics, sociology, history, and religion is progress
toward a "new paradigm" in the sociology of religion. "Thus, rather than viewing
American religion as a mere exception to or negation of the pattern of European
establishment, new paradigm sociologists have learned from historians to view U.S.
religion as institutionally distinct and distinctively competitive" (Warner 1993:1051). For
interpreting the ferment in American religious life, the "new paradigm" is based on an
emergent "open market" (1045) deploying economic language and analogies – or rather
redeploying microeconomics, actually pioneered by Peter Berger, and later expanded
by sociologist Rodney Stark and colleagues, as Chesnut rightfully points out (2003:6) –
to better reflect the American realities over the old paradigm, which assumed the
"unidirectional logic of modernization theory" (Hackett 1988:466).

Rather than inevitably secularizing, the crux of religious competition and
mobilization in the United States has occurred because of modernity and
disestablishment (Warner 1993:1048-1049). Sociologists Finke and Stark argue that in
the absence of an American state religious monopoly, participation increased (1992:17-
19). Based on the foundations of eighteenth century disestablishment in the United
States, the new constitution embedded a federal guarantee for what was already an
American reality – religious pluralism. Finke and Stark argue, “In keeping with supply
and demand principles, to the degree that a religious economy is unregulated, pluralism
will thrive” (1992:18). Beyond the numerous Native American religious traditions and
slave religions including Islam, which were excluded from the developing body politic, Christians of all denominations settled the North American continent – Spanish, French, and English Roman Catholics, Calvinists, Reformed churches, and Anglicans, among numerous others – as did Jews. But despite the religious motivations for European settlers, the dominant religions suffered from empty pews, originally attributed to rising secularism in the early republic. However, historian Jon Butler (1990) writes that American lay religion in the colonial period was "awash in a sea of faith" even if few orthodox adherents actually peopled the pews.

Rather than becoming increasingly secular, Americans across the colonies expressed varying popular forms of religiosity other than church attendance in the congregations. “Indifferent for the most part to the Quakers and the Baptists, ordinary people had more sympathy for ideas originating in the occult sciences” (Hall 1989:7). Astrology, magic and witchcraft, and fortune-telling were all important popular religious expressions of early New Englanders and other colonists. Following the revolution, post-war optimism was secular in Enlightenment values, but clergymen were quick to "proclaim American independence and Christianity together" (Butler 1990:215-216).

Religious census data on the eve of the Revolution demonstrated only “seventeen percent of Americans were churched,” which rose to thirty-seven percent on the eve of the Civil War (Finke and Stark 1992:15). Early American popular religious eclecticism – despite low attendance – gave way to an "antebellum spiritual hothouse" (Butler 1990:225). Insofar as mainline denominations suffered declines in attendance, it was because they were unable to “cope with the consequences of religious freedom and the rise of a free market religious economy” (Finke and Stark 1992:54). Although sixty-
three percent of Americans were "unchurched" in the main denominations of the day, countless Americans were following upstart revivalist sects about to sweep the nation's competitive free market of religion (54-60).

The Second Great Awakening, the period of rapid capitalist expansion and industrialization, urbanization and immigration during the nineteenth century, was characterized by a populist and egalitarian religious spirit democratizing religion among the lay masses (Hatch 1989:220-226) and giving rise to numerous new religious movements (NRM), including the Latter-day Saints (113-122). "Embodying the aspirations and values of common people, upstarts hopelessly blurred the distinction between pulpit and pew. Their success may have been the most profoundly democratic upheaval in the early republic" (226). Populist religion and NRM therefore grew up immersed in pluralistic and competitive tensions, unlike the older churches (such as the Anglican/Episcopal in Virginia) which had to adjust to modernity (Warner 1993:1054) and declining membership. Revivalist itinerant preachers in the upstart sects undermined the limits of congregational and parish boundaries by fashioning unorthodox venues for eclectic participation. Many people, who were not necessarily in regular church attendance, were nevertheless concerned with religious matters, as was the Joseph Smith family, which was known to "search for truth in unorthodox places" (Shipps 1987:10). Popular practices among contemporaries of the day included a variety of occult and magic, as a priesthood of all believers from "the puritans to the Civil War" employed a "plowman" eclectic theology in dialectic with educated theologians pursuing the "reasonableness of Christianity" (Holifield 2003:4). Despite modernization and a secularizing political sphere, American political discourse has always included
theologies. So much so that despite a romanticized free marketplace for religions in America, the Mormons encountered significant persecution by their sectarian brothers, and antagonized the same with their anti-pluralistic, theocratic aspirations (Taysom 2011; Hill 1989).

In the two hundred year history of the United States, pluralism and disestablishment provided for the secularization of the civic polity, but scores of Americans have remained in some way religious. Because religious history in America has been voluntary rather than compulsory (Finke 1997:109-111), Americans have been free to associate and disassociate, dissent, and start new religious movements. Aside from the excluded Native Americans, the history of American religion has been the immigrant story, which is a story of religious vitality. Most immigrants have come from religious backgrounds, whether the early colonial immigrants or slaves, the waves of Italians, Irish, and Poles during the late 1800s, or the Asians and Latin Americans who have arrived since the post-1965 immigration reform. By the turn of the twentieth century, religious fervor had also given rise within American religion to a particular American evangelical protestant fundamentalism, which was an anti-modern religious mobilization that remains active today.

In late or postmodernity, religion is no less salient among Americans, and on this social fact many historians and sociologists now agree, including Berger. Berger addresses his "major change-of-mind" as the "abandonment of the old secularization theory" because although secularization occurs, it is "by no means the direct and inevitable result of modernity" (2001:445). Secularization "seemed less and less capable of making sense of the empirical evidence from different parts of the world (not
least the United States)” (445) and in fact, has provoked powerful “counter-
secularization” religious movements (Berger 1999:3). For Berger, religion in American
life may better be understood cyclically, or “resacralized.” Andrew Greeley suggests
that American religion broadly may comport to any or all of five models: secularization,
cyclic, episodic event, stability, and religious growth, depending on the indicators tested
(1989:6-7) but that overall, secularization is best tested as the null hypothesis, which
turns out to be a difficult one to falsify (12).

Secularization and Latin American Religion

The secularization thesis has been problematic in Latin American as well as in
the United States. Disestablishment occurred as a result of nineteenth century Latin
American independence movements and the collapse of Roman Catholic institutional
monopoly, which provided an unregulated religious market for public religious ferment.
However, revolutionary expulsion of the peninsulars did not mean a wholesale
replacement of Roman Catholicism, which continued to enjoy differentiated levels of
hegemony across the continent. Therefore, disestablishment – however uneven –
provided for the social opening in Latin America for the coming of modernity, religious
diversity, and Roman Catholic transformation (Peterson and Vásquez 2008:2).

Institutional Catholic adjustment to pluralization and modernity has been in crisis
ever since, while most laity Catholics had always practiced forms of syncretic religiosity
in an emergent “popular” church (Peterson and Vásquez 2008:127-141; Vásquez and
Marquardt 2003:28-29). Manuel Vásquez’s work in Brazil on the adjustment of Roman
Catholicism to modernity argues “the crisis of the popular church’s project and the
ascendance of Pentecostalism in Latin America point to a deeper crisis: that of
modernist concepts of human action, history, resistance and utopia” (1998:3). Although
in crisis, the Roman Catholic Church retains much of its cultural religious hegemony, which is a recruitment problem for NRM such as the Latter-day Saints. Meanwhile, across Latin America, the mostly nominal Catholic masses have remained impoverished by the uneven penetration of the modern capitalist project. Increasing urbanization was driven by import substitution industrialization employed throughout Latin America to reduce dependency on the United States following World War II. "It was not until masses of Latin Americans began moving out of villages, escaping the power of the [mostly Catholic] landed elite by migrating to the cities, that religious pluralization was able to begin in earnest" (Smith and Prokopy 1999:4). The new urban poor, concentrated in barrios and favelas, became the major focus of northern missionary activity, including the Mormons. Long subjected to colonialism, Latin American religion has been little in decline throughout its over 500 year history irrespective of imperial or state accommodation.

It is against this background that post-World War II Latin America began a religious transformation. Social space increasingly opened for competing religious sects. Following Vatican II's aggiornamento, progressive Catholicism – liberation theology’s 'preferential option for the poor' – became one of the "few participatory spaces to develop voice, citizenship, and democratic practice at the grassroots" (Vásquez 1999:2). By the 1980s, economic development theories had risen and fallen (Leys 1996), and the collapse of communism reverberated throughout Latin America as civilian democracies were elected to replace authoritarian regimes. Despite the updating of Catholicism, consolidating democracies, free trade globalization and neo-liberal economic policies, millions of Latin American people remain disenfranchised and
impoverished in new and fragmented social contexts. Redress has been the promise of competing social movements, which have included environmental, gender and identity, ethnic and indigenous, and religious grassroots movements (Vásquez 1999:2).

Included in this competition for followers have come additional waves of missionaries from the North: evangelical Protestants – most specifically Pentecostal – and Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and Latter-day Saints.¹ According to David Martin (1990), Pentecostalism would become for Latin America what he assumes it to have been for the United States – the purveyor of democratization, capitalist development, and ultimately secularization. While North American inspired pentecostalisms have enjoyed growth, an indigenous Latin American Pentecostal movement is also "a viable religious alternative for those seeking security in the face of an uncertain socio-economic future" (Anderson 2004:63) in late modernity.

Evangelical Pentecostals, Charismatic Catholics, and African diasporic religions are what Andrew Chesnut calls the "pneumacentric" religions, which he argues are "the most profitable religious producers" in the new religious economy (2003:5). Despite modernization theorists’ prediction of the decline of religion, resurgent indigenous expressions of faith (Cleary and Steigenga 2004:231) and African diasporic religions²

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¹ The Latter-day Saints had attempted to open missionary work in Chile as early as 1851. Although Chile had won independence in 1818, Parley Pratt's “experience in Chile certainly suggests how political restrictions on religious practice influence the evolution and spread of the church." Pratt concluded that the "restrictions placed on proselyting in South American countries where the Catholic Church enjoyed legal protection convinced the leadership of the church to suspend missionary efforts in this region" (Palmer and Grover 2008:74). The Mormons successfully entered South America by sending missionaries to Argentina in 1925 to proselyte among immigrant Europeans. But it was not until post-World War II, along with the protestantization of Latin America, that alternative North American Christian religious movements realized demonstrable success in recruitment.

² Steigenga and Cleary demonstrate that where secularization theory predicted religious decline, in Brazil it is not uncommon for the religious to have double or multiple memberships, and easy migration between religions (2007:38-39). Rather than individuals becoming secular as modernity would predict, in Brazil at least, people are often multi-religious.
(Peterson and Vásquez 2008:89-126; Steigenga and Cleary 2007:37-39) have responded to the expanded religious social space. And yet, other North American NRM s – alternative or neo-Christianities, such as the Latter-day Saints – have also enjoyed recruitment success in the newly competitive market but have been mostly under the radar of social science.

Across the hemisphere, religious mobilization continues to expand in response to and reaction against the encroachment of modernity. Rather than becoming another secular region, religion around the hemisphere has transformed, differentiated, and transgressed borders. Furthermore, religions use the very tools of modernity to spread their message in an increasingly globalized religious market. For example, the Latter-day Saints have been masterful at exporting religious goods via modern means – deploying worldwide missionaries, distributing the Book of Mormon and selections in local languages,\(^3\) circulating the Four Standard Works, as well as educational and promotional literature, broadcasting by satellite transmission, multi-media, and the Internet in numerous languages – all from centralized Salt Lake Temple Square to every peripheral mission field around the globe.

As North American missionary religions have spread southerly, there has been a reverse flow of migration northerly especially since the mid-1960s.\(^4\) Additionally, the phenomenon of "transnationalism" – that is, a pattern of interacting in both the US and the homeland simultaneously – is demonstrated through immigrant religion. If

\(^3\) For Book of Mormon new world translations, see Lasater (2003:22; Table 6).

\(^4\) Building the Kingdom: Mormons and the Americas (Lasater 2003) was in part, a study of Latino (including one Haitian family and one Jamaican member) immigrants and Dominican converts, some who had converted to Mormonism in their native countries, and then resettled in the U. S. to raise families. Since that time some of those families have deployed the next generation of missionaries and local leaders, including some of the participants in the case study later in this research.
increased migration is one of the prominent features of modernity, then migration should give way to increasing secularity among those populations migrating. Again, there is a failure of the secularization thesis to accommodate the robust religiosity among migrant peoples in the Americas. In fact, vibrant immigrant religion has been a permanent feature on the landscape of the U. S. And in immigrant communities, local religious denominations are often the most proficient and meaningful loci to negotiate American life while maintaining connections with the homeland.

Throughout the Americas, then, secularization – as an inevitable unilinear outcome of modernization – has not followed the model of predicted religious decline. Instead, disestablishment and pluralism in both continents has resulted in unregulated religious market economies and increased religious mobilization. Religion in the Americas is not marginalized by "irrationality" nor privatized outside of public purview. Berger concedes that there remain only two pockets which adhere to the old secularization paradigm: Western Europe and "a thin but very influential stratum of intellectuals – broadly defined, as people with western-style higher education, especially in the humanities and social sciences" (2001:445), which helps explain its "continuing plausibility" among some western intellectuals. In the "graveyard of failed theories," Stark proposes to lay secularization theory to rest, "requiescat in pace" (1999:270).

For Stark, one of the most notable refutations of the secularization thesis is the case of the Mormons (2005a). However, he fails to acknowledge the differentiation of secularization, which is a more nuanced secularization argument. For most assuredly, Mormonism has accommodated modern and secular society and even benefited from it (as Stark realizes), all the while individual Mormon piety and mobilization is high, in
large part, thanks to missions. In other words, arguments about secularization are not a zero-sum game where the new paradigm replaces wholesale the old paradigm.

**Problematizing the New Paradigm**

The new paradigm argues that in the United States modernity has not caused a decline in religion, but rather has resulted in unregulated religious markets and pluralization, which has led to inevitable religious competition and mobilization. This competition thesis predicts that as numerous religious suppliers compete for adherents, religions and religious people are mobilized resulting in more religious societies, not increasingly secular societies. Where the secularization thesis was based on European religious decline, the new paradigm argues the opposite has happened in the United States.

This critique, however, is not the end of debates on secularization despite Berger's concession and Stark's reassurance that it "rest in peace." Bruce has critiqued the new paradigm supply-side theories of religion – the "malign influence" of an American clique of academics – with what he hopes will be “the stake through the vampire’s chest” (1999:1-2). His critique includes the reductionism of the macro-economic supply-side approach that “attempts to explain too much with just one principle” in the “deep structure” of secularization (21), such as in applications to culture, community, identity, diversity, and differentiation. For example, the competition thesis underestimates the power of ascription – nationality and ethnicity – on religion, and overestimates the power of the state regulatory apparatus.

Across Europe adherence is far higher in countries dominated by one religion – Poland and Ireland, for example – than in diverse cultures such as the United Kingdom. In the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, overwhelmingly Catholicism Lithuania has a far higher rate of church adherence than have the more mixed Latvia and Estonia (Bruce 2006:10; Bruce 2000).
The powerful social pressure of religion by birth, both nationally and ethnically, cannot be overlooked, which is also seen in the adherence of nominal Catholics of all Latin American nationalities and ethnicities. Bruce, in European case studies, and Vásquez and Marquardt (2003) researching in the Americas argue that new paradigm proponents have confined their critique of secularization to a U.S. centric model. It is further arguable that if secularization theory (in Europe) was unilinear and unidirectional, the competition theory (in the U. S.) is also unilinear and unidirectional in the opposite direction.

The history of U. S. Mormonism refutes the new paradigm supply-side competition thesis, and shares commonalities with Bruce's argument (Phillips 1998). Where Mormonism predominates in Utah, church attendance is much higher than elsewhere (1998:120). Phillips argues that as "church and community social ties are consolidated and religious and community norms fused, large market share churches will exhibit high levels of religious activity" (128). Rather than competition theory being unilinear, Phillips demonstrates that in the Mormon case, it is more "curvilinear." Where competition under pluralism does force "churches to meet the demands of potential adherents," once critical mass of membership obtains, "the consolidation of church and community social ties promotes church activity among members of the monopoly church" (128). This is the classical new religious movement transition from sect to church whereby a deviant sect gains enough followers and respectability to assert social cohesion. In Mormon Utah, consolidation of ties makes "disobeying church rules subject to community sanctions" (127), where "adherents’ exercise of religious options" are constrained because "like-minded religionists are densely concentrated" (128).
Phillips further demonstrates through Mormon history that as the church adjusted from a separatist Utah theocracy to an American denomination, its conservative features that promoted endogamy and high birth rates through a distinctive "polity, theology and ritual" actually increased Mormon participation (1999:72-79). This study of endogamy and birthrates concurs with Bruce's argument for the importance of ascription and family traditions. Ultimately, Phillips concludes that the Mormon case – and the U. S. religious economy – is best understood utilizing the neglected neo-secularization thesis, which accounts for the complexity of differentiation – that is, how institutional structural changes and individual preferences in religiosity are negotiated over time relative to structural change (2004).

Differentiation is well demonstrated in the case of the Latter-day Saints. The nineteenth century new religious movement began in the unorthodox religious ferment of upstate New York’s "burned over district." Benefitting from the competitive religious marketplace, their missionary efforts recruited converts from many sources, denominational and non-affiliates, as the Mormons grew in number. Although the American scene was pluralistic, it was hostile to the LDS who endured numerous persecutions and relocations, finally exiling in the Great Salt Lake Basin, where Smith’s vision of a theocracy came to fruition under Brigham Young, his successor, up to the 1890s. Subject to federal military intervention, the separatist Mormons relinquished the religious practice of plural marriage and its economic order, which can be understood as accommodations to the secular state after which the Latter-day Saints transformed their religion into a durable American religion and the Utah territory into an American state (Alexander 1986). For Latter-day Saints, the end of plural marriage resulted from a
revelation to Prophet Woodruff, known as the Woodruff Manifesto 1890, rather than as a secular accommodation. It was nevertheless the abandonment of a distinctively Mormon religious practice that was catalyzed by a federal demand. The state of Utah prospered under majority Mormon life, a culture that expanded through the Intermountain west into a “Mormon culture region” (Meinig 1965). Increasingly immersed in secular American public and political life, Mormons nevertheless remained a distinctive subculture, a "peculiar people" set apart by religious values and social structure (O’Dea 1957:222, 258). Accommodation to the secular state however, did not make Mormons less religious.

Secularization theory predicts that as religious institutions become more secular (due to the declining scope of religious authority) individuals also become more secular due to decreasing religiosity; neo-secularism says that as religious institutions become more secular, adherents cannot necessarily be expected to become more secular, but rather will differentiate their religiosity in response to a secularizing institution. In the Mormon case, as the institutional church necessarily transformed away from theocracy relinquishing religious authority over the state in the late 1800s, adherents did not necessarily become more secular – rather their religiosity differentiated in ways that increased their religious participation. As theocratic rule in Utah declined, Mormons took to the pews increasing their numerical participation (Phillips 2004:143), irrespective of over 100 years of religious pluralism that included Jews, Catholics and numerous protestant denominations in Utah (144).

In sum, although the U. S. has always enjoyed religious pluralism and competition, institutional secularism in the public sphere developed unevenly following
disestablishment. To the extent that modernity has brought secularity in the U. S., it is the social institutions that have secularized, not necessarily the religiosity of the people, among whom there are wide variances in expressions of religiosity. In the U.S., religion did not decline as a result of modernization, but rather, religiosity has been subject to differentiation – the political sphere is constitutionally secular while religion infuses public life and individual preferences, which are not necessarily characterized by church attendance as the only quantifiable form of religiosity. These are important differentiations that neo-secularism nuances when trying to sort out the utility of paradigms – old, new, and neo. Clearly, secularization is not a social or sociological fiction, but neither is religion becoming less salient in the late-modern world.

**Problematizing Rational Choice Theory**

Within the new economies of religion paradigm, rational choice theories are as problematic as the competition theory, based on the economic assumption of utility maximization. While Warner (1993) gave little explicit attention to rational choice theory as part of the developing new paradigm, Finke and Stark (1992), and Iannaconne (1997a) expanded the model dramatically. Assuming that all religions operate within a pluralistic unregulated free market absent any constraints, rational choice theory makes three economic assertions: First, individual “act rationally, weighing the costs and benefits of potential actions, and choosing those actions that maximize their net benefits;” second, “ultimate preferences (or needs) that individuals use to assess costs and benefits tend not to vary much from person to person or time to time;” and third, “social outcomes constitute the equilibria that emerge from the aggregation and interaction of individual actions” (Iannaconne 1997a:26). These assertions have been critiqued within the literature in both North Americanist and Latin Americanist camps as
too utilitarian, limited and simplistic to capture the complexity of religion across units of analysis and accounting for their interplay and change over long periods of time.

Rational choice theorists agree that religious people are rational actors in what has been considered a largely "irrational" phenomenon – religion, which has defied even the consensus of a definition – where beliefs in the gods or supernatural forces do not comport to the scientific method of inquiry. Beyond the agreement that religious actors are rational, the critics swarm. The entire theory rests problematically on the assumption of a state-sponsored free and unconstrained religious market, which is not necessarily the case. As for the first assertion, weighing costs and maximizing benefits, religious people may or may not be inclined to preemptively calculate a cost/benefit analysis even if such a formula exists for doing so. Further, cost benefit analysis is ill equipped in its capacity to measure an intangible reward such as salvation, for example. A tragically illustrative case is from Anna Peterson's work on martyrdom among progressive Catholics in El Salvador's civil war, and worth quoting at length. Among the Salvadoran martyrs and their families, religious choice was not about utility nor was choice unconstrained:

In the end, a range of reasons, understood differently by insiders and outsiders, influence people's decisions about religious commitment and praxis. Because these decisions concern intangibles such as salvation, truth, and ultimate meaning, the rational weighing of material costs and benefits cannot fully explain the choices believers make. Nor does the notion that rational analysis takes place in an intellectual and moral "free market" where all options are equally accessible. In real life, people face limited options in a context that is far from truly free. This is especially true for poor people, in El Salvador and elsewhere, whose access to alternative actions, lifestyles, and worldviews has been severely constrained. They choose rationally, but among limited options and in conditions [ie, persecution] not of their own choosing (1997:164).
The second assertion that individual preferences (or needs) vary little from person to person or over time is not generally the case; religious demands are not inelastic, in fact. Peoples’ demands have great elasticity, which helps explain so much diversity in religious firms or suppliers. Henri Gooren uses rational choice as a “useful methodological aid” to examine Mormon and Neo-Pentecostal religious choices among religious firms in Guatemala City. He disagrees that individual “preferences (needs) are a stable and unchangeable set.” Instead, Gooren points out that “religious needs do change over the course of peoples' lifetime and, moreover … people are aware of this phenomenon” (1999:11). Especially in a pluralistic milieu, or as in the case of Latin America where religious choices are so important in a region where poor people have been historically marginalized, it may be that over the long haul of a person's lifetime in fact, the demand assumptions should be the inverse – that needs and preferences can be expected to change. In Gooren's later work on Latin American Pentecostals, Catholics, and Mormon, he demonstrates that as people's lives evolves, so too does their religious participation and associations, in what he calls "conversion careers" (2007:52-71).

With regard to the third assertion that social equilibrium is the aggregate of individuals’ actions, quite the inverse can also be expected – it is social disequilibrium that sometime occurs, again in the case of Latin America's tumultuous trajectory toward modernity, based on aggregated actions at all levels of society. Despite disestablishment and religious pluralism, nascent and insufficiently consolidated democracies throughout Latin America have vacillated in and out of civil strife, and people have experienced political and religious repression as a consequence of long
term structural inequalities. If the U. S.-centric new paradigm provides for free competition and rational choices in a relatively peaceful society, it has little to say about religious choices and resistance in the face of structural violence and persecution, and pervasive impoverishment.

The problems of rational choice as a theory are demonstrated by Stark, ironically, applying a rational choice approach to study Latter-day Saints and fertility in the U. S., in what he calls the "phenomenology of sacrifice" (2005b). It is documented elsewhere (Heaton, Goodman, and Holman 2001) that American Mormons prefer to have large families but they practice birth control and have families only slightly larger than non-Mormons, irrespective of instructions from General Authorities to have large families. Stark adds that professional Mormons have larger families than do "Mormon laborers" (2005b:89). Empirically, the conclusions are quantifiably sound, but it is curious that a scholar who is reputable for studying Mormons would ignore the all-important "real answer." Tiffany Gee Lewis, a mother and writer, explains in the popular magazine, Mormon Times,

The real answer to why we have large families is much more complicated. It involves an understanding of a pre-mortal realm, where millions of souls are just waiting to come down. And we feel that, as good parents with the gospel covenant, we want to take as many as we can handle emotionally, physically and mentally. And the final reason comes because of something called obedience. When, through the Spirit, the Lord taps us on the shoulder and says, "There's another one meant to come to this family of yours," we believe in obeying His will. God's first commandment to Adam and Eve was to "multiply and replenish the Earth," and that remains our first charge as husband and wife. For some families, that means one child; for others it means 10 (Lewis 2008).

For Lewis and millions of other Mormons who may or may not defer decisions on family size to the General Authorities, they nevertheless base reproductive choices on doctrinal beliefs, which are conditioned by their living realities. Stark can measure the
choices, but he did not ask or measure why Mormons prefer and have larger families. Mormons, like millions of religious people worldwide, trust that if God intends for them to have a child, God, too, will provide a way to handle the size of the family, "emotionally, physically and mentally." Basing such a reproductive choice on belief in doctrine or obedience to sacred authorities is in no way a non-rational choice if it does not comport to rational choice theory; instead, for Mormons to provide spirit children with an earthly embodiment makes perfect sense, obeying God's will, applying doctrine, and following General Authority instructions. Stark's explanation for the "phenomenology of sacrifice" could have provided for a much richer, a more instructive, and nuanced phenomenological sociology for understanding of the Mormon sacred obligation to build families, rather than being preoccupied by rational choice as a theory. In fact, his study demonstrates that Stark uses rational choice as a method to quantify behavioral choice, but it does not rise to a general theoretical construct to explain the religious choice.

In short, where rational choice may have utility as a "methodological aid" is in microeconomics, where an actor behaves in ways that "maximizes benefits" rather than as a theoretical construct with predictive power (Ammerman 1997:120). In the LDS case, young missionaries make a very rational choice to sacrifice two years of their lives to carry the gospel worldwide, as demonstrated later in this study. This sacrifice may not appear rational to non-Mormons, but the tangible benefits for LDS missionaries are very real, and the intangibles are of immeasurable worth by Mormon definition. To the extent that rational choice can serve as a larger metaphor with explanatory power, Ammerman says its "power may derive from the dominance of this metaphor [economic rationality] in contemporary society, not from any inherent characteristics of human
beings” (1997:120). Bruce is less charitable. If demand is stable, then all religious change must be explained by supply-side theories. He writes, “Stark’s interest in denying secularization [demand-side] meets an important trend in US intellectual life: the imperialism of economists. Despite their inability to predict or manage the economy, economists have been attempting to encompass ever larger fields of human activity” (1999:45).

Clearly, there is difficulty supplanting the old paradigm (demand-side) with the new paradigm (supply-side) as unresolved debates persist. While the old paradigm secularization thesis has largely been replaced by the supply-side competition thesis in the sociology of religion, there are still cases in which secularization and neo-secularization theory hold. Further, supply-side theories are macro-economic models that ignore the demand-side and do not capture the complexities of numerous differentiations at many levels of analysis, especially that of the individual. And while religious individuals are rational actors who may at times maximize benefits as they so define them, cost-benefit analysis is not the only behavior in which they engage when making religious choices, if they calculate at all. It is not uncommon for adherents to a religious tradition to fall away for a time, practice and combine alternative spiritualities, and perhaps return to their religion of ascription later in life – or not. At the macro-market level, the institutional level, the cultural level, and in the individual sphere there is differentiation for which the competition and rational choice models fail to account.

Warner later concedes the problems of the new paradigm, ”[t]hus, research on the effects of religious pluralism on individual religious participation is far from decisive for the claims of the old and new paradigms” (2002:13). Vásquez and Marquardt write,
"[t]he result of these [economic model] simplifications is a one-dimensional view of religious practices and institutions that is at odds with the increasing complexity and fluidity engendered by the recent episode of globalization" (2003:24). At this point in late modernity, when we all agree that religious people act on choices understood by them to be rational, where the world is both secular and religious in many differentiated ways, how best then to account for religious diversity and continued mobilization?

**Reassessing Paradigms: The Mormons**

In particular, this work is concerned with the mobilization of the LDS Church as a case study in religion in the Americas; in North America where it emerged and is growing, as it expands in Latin America and finds Book of Mormon descendants among the potential recruits. It is instructive to return to Warner's old paradigm v. new paradigm schematic\(^5\) (See Table A-1, adapted from Warner 1993:1052; *upper case letters added for explanation; juxtaposition of LDS added*). Rather than assuming that religions fall neatly into Warner's dichotomous categories, the Latter-day Saints demonstrate varying indicators under both paradigms.

Historically (See Table A-1, letter B), the Latter-day Saints are a nineteenth century North American new religious movement emerging in the Second Great Awakening that also understands itself by revelation to Joseph Smith as the restoration of the eternal and original Christian church modeled by the first century apostles, which became also the "vehicle for the reconstitution for the family of Abraham and the gathering of the saints in Zion, God's "new Israel" on the American frontier" (Shipps

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\(^5\) Although Warner writes that he "overstated" the schematic contrasts between old and new paradigm indicators (2002:6), to juxtapose the Latter-day Saints against both paradigms, however flawed the indicators may be, is to better understand how both paradigms are useful in understanding the Mormons.
The Mormons are competitive while aspiring ultimately to monopoly status through disestablishment in pluralistic societies (A). The LDS Church has been demonstrated to fit a neo-secular curvilinear model, which includes institutional secularization but increasing adherent participation, and is therefore, differentiated and mobilized by a highly motivated three-fold mission program (D). They understand the pluralistic environment as both constitutive for their aims and degenerative to their cause (G).

The Latter-day Saints need the pluralistic unregulated market in which to send missionaries and gain converts in the mission field, but they also see the world as potentially the devil’s playground in need of conversion to what they believe will become God’s kingdom on Earth – a Mormon one. The LDS Church is a demanding or "strict" religion (Iannacone 1997b) and a distinctive religious subcultural group (O’Dea 1957) both of which provide a level of protective insulation (E) for adherents. The Mormons mobilize and revitalize through lay entrepreneurs (F) as missionaries from all adult age groups, with an all-male priesthood that operates the local congregations (branches, wards, stakes, and missions) and runs the institutional hierarchy, all of which are routinized and bureaucratized (C). Their universal organization draws from all social groups and is congregational across a global periphery from a centralized location in the Salt Lake City Temple Square hierarchy (H, I). Mormonism is functional and structural;

6 Bloom comments on the universal LDS intention. “No other American religious movement is so ambitious, and no rival even remotely approaches the spiritual audacity that drives endlessly towards accomplishing a titanic design. The Mormons fully intend to convert the nation and the world; to go from some ten million souls to six billion. This is sublimely insane, not merely because of the stunning numbers, but primarily because it means going up against such worldwide antagonists as the Roman Catholic Church and Islam, as well as such endlessly subtle formulations as Buddhism and Hinduism. Yet the Mormons will not falter; they will take the entire twentieth-first century as their span, if need be, and surely it will be” (1992:94).
Mormons seek solidarity and morale through acculturation while simultaneously providing a sacred canopy for finding meaning, explanation, and refuge within the Heavenly Father's revealed universe (J).

Expanding internationally, LDS leaders understand that identities are and will be contested and negotiable, that outside recruitment (L) among non-Anglo peoples will yield a multicultural church (K). For example, formerly Catholic Latinos converts – if they sufficiently acculturate and consolidate Mormonism – will become Latino Mormons who may in the short-term continue some “Catholicisms.” But the LDS also acculturate in such a way\(^7\) as for Mormon identity to become at some point taken-for-granted, hopefully to be passed on by ascription, after which the eight-year-old will accept baptism into the faith, and through ongoing generations, a primordial identity will replace Catholicism altogether (L). Highly disciplined and goal oriented, the Latter-day Saints are a “peculiar” or covenant people, rapidly internationalizing under a sacred canopy imparted to Joseph Smith what would become a new religious phenomenon – the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Those theorists whose work is most applicable to Mormonism – O’Dea, Berger, Greeley, Stark, Shipps, and Davies, all draw deeply from the sociological classics, Weber and Durkheim, as well as the phenomenology of religion. As is apparent, the Latter-day Saints straddle the old and new paradigm indicators that Warner sets forth.

\(^7\) As one research participant told me, if residual Catholicisms persist, such as wearing a crucifix, the Latter-day Saints attempt to ‘teach it away’ – in other words, rather than admonishing the new convert for wearing the crucifix, by teaching and example that other Mormons don’t engage in such practices, the old ways leave as the convert’s new identity is consolidated. Meanwhile, the LDS understand and expect a few contestations along the path for each new convert – as I was repeatedly reminded, Mormonism is a totally new way of life; it is the consolidation over time of a new identity that doesn’t just happen just because there is a testimony. This new identity is a new master status, discussed later of this study.
In Warner’s update of the new paradigm, he reduces and revises the paradigm to “five claims about the American (i.e., United States) religious system” (2002:7), which are set forth below. Again, there is some variance in the Mormon case with regard to these claims, despite its being a quintessential American religion. Using the Latter-day Saints to think about these new paradigm claims helps to demonstrate the U. S.-centrism of the new paradigm, how the Mormon case is paradoxical in its application, and again helps problematize the new paradigm as the singular theoretical device available for understanding religion generally, and in particular, the Latter-day Saints.

The first claim of Warner’s revised new paradigm is that “disestablishment means that there is an "open market for religion" in the U. S., which in turn means that "barriers to entry are low” (it’s easier to open a storefront church than an auto dealership, let alone an airline), and churches therefore operate in a competitive environment” (2002:7). As a Second Great Awakening American new religious movement, Mormonism arose in a pluralistic and competitive religious market reinforced by disestablishment, and yet Mormons were “fugitives” from that very same competitive modern social milieu, “their Kingdom of God a refuge” (Hill 1989:5). While disestablishment is necessary for Latter-day Saint recruitment and competition, their monopolistic designs and high barriers to entrance make Mormonism a strict and distinctive religion with highly correlated standards for participation. The opening of local congregations is directed by the authorities in Salt Lake City, as is recruitment, which requires hurdling high barriers to entrance. As in the U. S., Latin American disestablishment provides social space for religious competition, where Latter-day Saints are recruiting with success. However, barriers to entry are not low and these
high demands are sometimes constraints to joining and problematic for retention, while in other cases may serve as an appeal.

The second claim is that "American religion flourishes in conditions of cultural pluralism because churches provide social space for cultural particularisms" (Warner 2002:7). The nascent LDS Church consolidated its cultural particularism, or distinctiveness, in the community experience of Kirtland, Ohio yielding revelations on plural marriage, held secret by Joseph Smith from as early as 1831 to its recording in D&C 132 in 1843, and baptism for the dead, two of the most culturally particular features of Mormonism (Quinn 1978). But the one troubling particularism – plural marriage – later threw the church into an institutional and federal crisis, resolved in the 1890 repudiation of the practice if not the doctrine. Clearly, there are conflicts within and limits to the social space for cultural particularisms. Nevertheless, the LDS remain a distinctive religious culture apart from orthodox Christianity demonstrating a productive tension between religious particularism and secular accommodation (Mauss 1994). Going forward, as Mormon culture encounters other world cultures, the process of acculturation seeks to unite as one in Christ by universally appealing to all peoples at all times while remaining culturally distinctive and demanding. As the church grows in open social spaces, it also points to the opportunities, challenges, and dangers of open social spaces, be they secular, American or foreign.

The third claim is that “religious competition promotes structural change to accommodate institutions to new realities” (Warner 2002:7). As has been demonstrated earlier, the two major structural changes within Mormonism – repudiation of plural marriage and black priesthood denial – had nothing to do with religious competition. In
the case of polygamy, structural change was due to accommodation to the American body politic in the shift from separatist polygamist movement to an American church, and from a theocratic territory to an American state. In the case of overturning “black priesthood denial” (Bringhurst 1981), the institutional church did not yield to the 1960s U. S. Civil Rights movement, which was mobilized by churches. Instead, a confluence of events through the 1960s and 70s including civil rights unrest, the emergence of “New Mormon History” and its historical and scriptural critique of black priesthood denial, the political aspirations of high profile Mormons, and international expansion all fomented change (193). Opening the priesthood to men of African descent in June, 1978 coincided with and may have been catalyzed in part by the impending dedication of the São Paulo, Brazil Temple, September, 1978 (Grover 1990). Bringhurst quotes Deseret News from June 10, 1978, that missionary work in Brazil resulted in the “often impossible” task of determining which Brazilian “Church members have black ancestry and which do not” bringing the issue of the priesthood ban “to a head” (1981:191). In both cases in the Americas, institutional differentiation and change were not the products of religious competition but more likely a resolution of internal contradictions and accommodations to national realities. For most Mormons however, in both cases, these institutional resolutions were the products of heavenly revelation divinely timed, not religious competition or social accommodations, and not necessarily internal contradictions.

Claim four states that “American religion promotes individual and group empowerment, serving as a vehicle for popular democratic movements” (Warner 2002:7). Like many other American denominations, the LDS Church promotes
individual and group empowerment. Empowering individual agency and responsibility are noticeable features within Mormonism, while at the same time Latter-day Saints are encouraged and sanctioned by the church community. To the extent religious empowerment serves as a vehicle for democracy, this is not necessarily inevitable. As has been shown, even though invitation into the church is democratic, the separatist LDS Church was not democratic, nor were movements within Mormonism tolerated, resulting in numerous schisms and excommunications. In the contemporary church, the Mormon movement against California’s Proposition Eight, defining marriage as only between a man and a woman, may appear to be less than democratic and a breach of the separation of church and state by the institutional church. Yet, for the numerous Mormons who exercised their political position in defense of family doctrine based on the ordinance of heterosexual marriage, democratic participation is alive and well. Both internally and externally, democratic participation may or may not be necessarily empowered. In Latin America where the relationship between democracy and religious competition is still young, democratic participation remains highly variable across states, among numerous social, cultural, and religious movements. In some cases, religion fosters democratic empowerment, in others it thwarts participation; in Mormonism, it can be either case. U. S. Mormons are highly politically motivated; it would be inappropriate to claim Latin American Mormons are as well.

The fifth claim, that “religious individualism is traditionally American,” (Warner 2002:7) is problematic given that religious individualism – individual salvation based upon grace alone and not on works – was one of the main tenets of the European Protestant Reformation, which America inherited through European settlement.
Nevertheless, religious individualism has long been reified within American Protestantism, and is also applicable to Mormonism having risen within the Protestant milieu of the American northeast. But from its inception to consolidation in the separatist Kirtland community, through its exile in Salt Lake and transition up to Utah Statehood, the LDS Church was also an exercise in authoritarian communal theocracy. “Kirtland represents the effort to mix the individualistic with the authoritarian” (Quinn 1978:12-17). This productive tension between the agency of the individual and submission to the LDS authorities is still true today, even as the structural institutions have secularized providing greater social space for the exercise of individual agency.

Mormons are the most successful of the American home-grown Second Great Awakening new religious movements, a case that should fit Warner’s U. S.-centric model well. But the contradictions within these five claims when applied to the Latter-day Saints help to demonstrate some residual problems with Warner’s revisions of the new paradigm.

In the sociology of religion it is clear that the complexity of religion requires more than just one theory, one paradigm, one metaphor, and one method. Another UK scholar of religion, Callum Brown, in 1992 (one year prior to Warner’s introduction of the new paradigm) anticipated the relationship between religion and social change. Brown sets forth these predictive principles, which are still relevant in understanding global religion as quoted in Greeley:

The social significance of religion (1) can rise and fall in any social and economic contest – pre-industrial, industrial, post-industrial; (2) does not decay automatically or irreversibly with the growth of human knowledge, rationality or technology; (3) does not decay automatically or irreversibly with industrialization or urbanization; (4) is not to be measured by unity of religious belief or uniformity of religious adherence in a given nation/region; (5) can be challenged
by fundamental social and economic change, and can suffer short to medium-term decay, but can adapt to the new context and can show significant long-term growth; and (6) can change the ways, or the balance of ways, in which it arises from one social and economic context to another (Greeley 2003:Epigraph).

Scholarship always benefits from cross-fertilization, including transatlantic and interdisciplinary exchanges, unless inappropriately applied. For Bruce, the new paradigm rests on one simple mistake that makes it "beyond redemption" – "that economics offers a viable model for understanding all social action" (2002:182). Bruce cites numerous refutations from many researchers studying religious mobilization across countries and in various periods of history. He concludes,

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\ldots \text{even in fluid situations [such as the U. S.], religious behavior is shaped by social norms that prevent maximizing: class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and language all limit choice. But religion itself limits choice. To the extent that people are successfully socialized into a particular religion they are not able to see other religions as utility-maximizing opportunities. And even if they could, the mechanical requirements for making an economistic rational choice are missing; we cannot compare costs and rewards (182).}
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One decade after introduction, an introspective rethinking of the new paradigm approach is useful to understanding the Mormons. For example, Paul Johnson calls for a balance between the "individualist utilitarian assumptions of the market model" and the "concept of the community [which] emphasizes that individuals' interests may be expanded through emotional bonds with fellow-members and identification with the community's welfare and values" (2003:325). Mormons have successfully balanced the tensions between religious individualism on the one hand with the community of believers on the other, as will be discussed in the case study later.

Latter-day Saints cannot be understood apart from their beliefs as a religious community. Importantly, the sociology of religion has long understood that "beliefs
sediment so as to shape our receptivity to future alternatives and that beliefs are associated with enduring identities and supporting communities" (Bruce 2002:175). Irrespective of levels of religious adherence over a lifetime, then, the "most plausible beliefs that accord with the residues of the earlier stage of belief" are the enduring factors that will shape future choices (175) rather than cost benefit maximization. “Religious organizations do not compete simply because one leader wants a following larger than another leader’s, although that may certainly be a part of the story; they compete because they have different beliefs” (Wuthnow 2006:142). Wuthnow reminds us that it is over religious belief that people have been willing to die where although other things were at stake, "one group believed it knew the truth and thus knew also that the other group's religion was false" (143). That truth, that belief, is sacred, having been received "primarily through revelation and received wisdom" such as in the Mormon case (Albrecht 1989:57), in the interplay between the divine and the tradition's community, respectively.

Greeley revisits religion in Europe, finding that there generally remains a need for religion despite secularization, which emerges from “two incorrigible human ailments – life from which we eventually die and hope which raises the possibility that death is not the end” (2003:xiv). To die and to hope are the existential experiences that summon meaning-making, or religious response. Greeley, following Clifford Geertz and going beyond (1982:162), argues that a religion paradigm consists of experience, symbol, story, and community (1985:xvi) and further, that religious symbols are rooted “in

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8 Greeley’s first and last concluding observations with regard to religion in Europe: “The decline of religion in Britain, the Netherlands, and France is not necessarily paradigmatic for the rest of Europe;” and “no single, all-embracing model can describe the condition of European religion, much less predict its future. One must take refuge in Brown’s paradigm cited at the beginning of this book” (2003:214-215).
experiences of grace which renew human hopefulness..." (1982:162). These experiences of grace are those phenomena that are of immeasurable worth to the religious person and are reckoned within a system that provides meaning.

Acknowledging the contribution of Eliade's phenomenological concern with meaning, Greeley writes "people will need religion as long as they need meaning. Whatever may be their ultimate explanation for the meaning of life that will be their religion. The universe may be absurd – at times a highly persuasive position – but we cannot tolerate its absurdity" (1985:xiv), which echoes Berger's ideas about plausibility and protection of a sacred canopy in a chaotic universe. Placing himself in the sociological camp of Weber, Parsons, Geertz, Berger and Luckmann, giving meaning or order to experience (Greeley 1982:162) – Berger's nomos – is the task of the human imagination, or "religious imagination" as Greeley calls it (1985:xvi). Interestingly, although Greeley’s work is claimed by the new paradigm proponents, he also shares a phenomenological approach with earlier works including James, Otto, Buber, O'Dea, Eliade, Geertz and Berger. Lawrence Young writes that all of these thinkers concur that, "the nature of religion must begin with a recognition that nonrational religious experience exists at the core of all religions" (1997:136). Religion’s "raw power is experience [that] leads to imagery in the imperfect attempts to communicate and preserve the experience through stories. Religions, then, are story-telling communities rooted in these core experiences. The imagery in these stories is symbolic of a reality beyond itself... " (136). Young signals a necessary and growing response by a few new paradigm proponents to reconsider the phenomena, or experience, of religion – that
which is immeasurable. Phenomenology "points towards something more fluid than a formal model of organization" or a "clearly defined analytical framework" (135).

There is a growing reemergence of phenomenology in other disciplines, in addition to religion, recognizing that humans live “across many different social domains” and “experience many emotional cross-pressures” (Riis and Woodhead 2010:210). As “cost-benefit calculation is losing credibility as an adequate account of social action” aggregated by rational actors, a renewed interest in the significance of experience and emotion can be seen, for example, in international relations where the emotional experiences of “fear, terror, solidarity, and trust” are becoming “a central focus” (207). Experiences are emotionally laden, where the emotions are not a “thing” but rather “an embodied stance with the world,” which religions attempt to order by “… providing anchorage for meaning and moral identity, and a reference point for mundane interactions and choice” (208-210).

"Religion is not irrational or antirational. On the contrary it must be subject to rational reflection precisely because we are reflective creatures. But before religion is reflective it is experiential, imaginative, narrative" (Greeley 1985:xv). Religious experience, symbols, metaphors, and narratives, among others, provide for expansive understandings of religious phenomena. Certainly, this was the case of Joseph Smith, who experienced a hierophany in the sacred grove containing the first revelation, which became the basis for the Mormon religion. With its history replete in profound supernatural experiences, most importantly those of ongoing prophetic and personal revelation restored, Latter-day Saints experience a very thin and porous boundary between heaven and earth.
In the Mormon worldview, a God who communicates directly with his covenant people is perfectly rational. To better understand Mormon rationality, the perspective must be much broader than that of rational choice theory or supply-sides theories only. Although the supply-side theories of religious market competition and rational choice have discredited the sacred canopy, “the demise of the canopy metaphor may be premature” (Jelen 2002:197). In other words, the supply-side theorists threw out the baby with the bath water; when they discarded Berger’s ideas about secularization they also discarded useful sociological metaphors that help capture the phenomena of religion as a sacred ‘nomos.’ In so doing, they ignored the entire study of the demand side of religion, flat lining the needs and preferences of individuals aggregated as inelastic. When studying religion and the problem of existence, the sacred canopy is still useful even to new paradigm theorists if they are open to the non-verifiable religious experiences of adherents as rational, and are attendant to the metaphorical as well as the empirical.

After this demonstration of these paradigm features, which captures the theoretical dilemma that is Mormonism, we must turn elsewhere for more explanatory power. The sociology of religion fails to capture a comprehensive view of Mormonism because although it appears to be a corporate and bureaucratic, hierarchical institution, its claims are profoundly Christocentric and revelatory. Only by supplementing the sociology of religion with phenomenology does the faith of the Latter-day Saints come into sharper relief. Employing the sociology of religion along with a phenomenological approach, it will become evident that Joseph Smith’s theology rejects the bifurcations of temporal and spiritual, profane and sacred, the rational and the numinous. The rational
supplication of Joseph Smith made possible the restoration of revelation in the First Vision. For the first time since the apostolic age, Mormons believe God resumed divine communication with his prophet to a new “chosen” people. As a religious phenomenon in its own right, Mormonism employs latter-day revelation in a thoroughly rational and modern way, which will be demonstrated in this case study.
CHAPTER 4
PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS: RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, METAPHOR, AND RATIONALITY

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints straddles the old and new paradigms in the sociology of religion, paradoxically so. Mormonism fits the old model insofar as it is a centralized, institutional, hierarchical and authoritarian church with monopolistic aspirations that understands itself as the revealed and restored gospel – the ‘one true’ and eternal church of Jesus Christ – enacted by the early apostles, which is prophesied to become Zion, or the kingdom of God, fulfilled in this final dispensation by God’s covenant people, the Mormons. But because the Mormon church emerged from the ferment of the Second Great Awakening in the competitive and pluralist environment of U. S. religious history, it also exhibits the features associated with the new paradigm: a democratic entrepreneurial priesthood of believers, mobilized toward recruiting new individuals yearning for belonging, order and meaning through restoration of the primitive church of Jesus Christ in modern times.

According to critics of the old model, it should have been predictable that the demand for religion would decline with advancing modernity and secularization, but, the Mormon case is more complicated, as is religious history in the U. S. generally. Institutionally, the LDS Church has secularized pursuant to American accommodation, while it has also enjoyed robust domestic and international growth rather than decline. Therefore, the application of both paradigms in the sociology of religion provides a more nuanced understanding of Mormonism than could be realized through either paradigm alone. Nevertheless, these two competing paradigms in the sociology of religion remain insufficient to capture the complexity of this religion. Therefore, this project employs an interdisciplinary synthesis of theoretical approaches including phenomenology in
addition to sociology, as well as religious studies. And, by utilizing ethnographic and sociological methods, attention is paid to individual and cultural micro-processes at interplay with macro-institutional and social phenomena.

To serve as a bridge between the sociological paradigms of religion and the synthetic interdisciplinary approach, it is necessary in this chapter to attend to three contested terms in the study of religion, which three are reconsidered in the case of Mormonism: religious experience, metaphor, and rationality, as well as the boundary issues attendant the unique Mormon synthesis of revelation and rationalism. These terms are critical to both outsiders and insiders (often scholar adherents) because their contestation lies at the heart of theoretical disputes in the study of religion. In the sociology of religion the very argument over the old and new paradigms has divided scholars largely over the question of whether religious experience is rational or not; rational in terms of the western epistemological tradition as objective and empirically verifiable. The old paradigm predicted that as modernity rationally encroaches, the demand for religion would decline or become privatized as religion is demonstrated to be non-rational. The new paradigm argues that instead of declining, religion is mobilized in the modern pluralistic competitive market and that the behaviors, choices and beliefs of religious actors are rational. And so the debate becomes: how do scholars capture and analyze various religious experiences – which may be subjective and unverifiable – by the scientific method? In the Mormon case, how to explain the revelatory restoration of an ancient church in modern times? Or, to consider the religious experience of revelation in the case of Mormonism, how do scholars scientifically study the appearance of God and his son, Jesus Christ, to a teenager in
1820 America, or angelic visits disclosing a new book of scripture, or the phenomena of ongoing revelation to prophets and followers alike? Are these and other religious experiences rational; how are they articulated; and by whose analysis are they judged? In the Mormon case, the paradoxical negotiation between revelation in its many forms and rationality tax the intellect and challenge traditional western categories of religion.

Further, the postmodern critique of Enlightenment objectivism and rationalism as biased western intellectual projects has given scholars in the study of religion pause; it has also given missiologists, sociologists and anthropologists pause when reconsidering the history of mission and colonialism. The study of religious experience as a category – in this case, in the Western Monotheistic tradition – has attended the rise of western epistemology and is therefore, often subject to empirical suspicion and rational skepticism, if not outright derision. Generally, religious experience in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism is caught in the western double-bind. Religious experiences that may be empirically unverifiable by the standards of the western intellectual tradition are nevertheless real in their consequences for a world where western religions are powerful. According to Bosch (2005), the “objectivist framework imposed on rationality has had a crippling effect on human inquiry; it has led to disastrous reductionism and hence to stunted human growth” and impoverished understandings of each other and our religions. Bosch calls for an expansion of rationality to reclaim metaphor and myth in the study of religion, to rediscover “the sense of mystery and enchantment” (Bosch 2005:353). This debate has influenced scholars of religion, generally, resulting in a critique of the new paradigm as economic
empirical reductionism and an acknowledgement of the necessity of interdisciplinary
studies that together better capture the perspectives of adherents.

This debate about studying the religious experiences and lives of adherents in
society is not new. It was presaged during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
when phenomenologists of religion reacted against the increasing influence of emerging
scientific disciplines on the study of religion, which attempted to fit newly discovered
cultural forms into scientific evolutionary schemes “according to levels of complexity and
sophistication” (Cox 2006:67). Comte’s positivism confined “explanations of events in
this world to verifiable and measurable correlations between phenomena” turning
sociology into an emphatically empirical and progressive endeavor, comporting all
social theorizing to the scientific method of the natural sciences (72). Later sociologists,
Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber, synthesized social theory with religious studies in
significant contributions to the phenomenology of religion (67).

Together the work of Edmund Husserl, a founder of phenomenology, and Max
Weber influenced the work of Alfred Schutz and his interpretive sociology of the
phenomena of everyday life. These theorists, along with Durkheim, have influenced the
sociology and phenomenology of Peter Berger whose work is used in this project. For
Berger, religion as a sacred canopy – a metaphorical protection for the precariousness
of human existence – is part of the social construction of knowledge that establishes a
“nomos” or meaningful social order. “Whatever else it may be, religion is a humanly
constructed universe of meaning, and this construction is undertaken by linguistic
means” (Berger 1967:175). These categories of religious experience and rationality are
necessarily reconsidered, explained through metaphors both literal and figurative in this project on Mormonism.

**The Interplay of Religious Experience, Metaphor, and Rationality**

The phenomenology of religion studies religion as *sui generis* rather than as epiphenomenal of other behavioral or social processes (Cox 2006:4). Many scholars attempt to understand a religion in the way its followers or insiders do, as in the emic approach. Because religions are often based upon mysterious religious experiences understood by the beholder as sacred, which are empirically unverifiable and subjective, as is the LDS Church, there is the necessity to utilize metaphors to help describe that which may be ineffable or otherwise incredulous to outsiders. The rational imagination articulates by linguistic means, such as through the use of metaphors, religious experiences with deity and the supernatural, including prophecies and revelations. While these phenomena are taken as divinely *given* by religious insiders, they are often suspect to outsiders. Further, the more recent the religious phenomena, the more suspect they may be. “Religious experience in the third century is fascinating. Religious experience in the twentieth century is frightening or absurd” (Neusner in McCollum 1981:178), or even dangerous. The religious experiences of Joseph Smith, Jr., in nineteenth century America upon which he translated a new scripture, founded a new religious movement, and governed it with esoteric revelations were perceived by outsiders as nothing short of heresy and blasphemy, for which he was murdered.

Because the social scientific study of religion insists upon an objective outsider or etic approach, which assumes rationalism based on empiricism, the credibility of religious phenomena that do not comport to methodological refutation fall into question as irrational subjective experience. These positions of objective and subjective have
been seen as mutually exclusive. Rather than taking an either/or approach, together the metaphorical and imaginative in this synthesis expands rationality beyond objective empiricism. The Mormon case provides an opportune project in attempting to comprehend how the Latter-day Saints see their religion based on religious experience, most importantly revelation and the fulfillment of prophecy, as entirely rational however subjective and paradoxical. What may appear as another form of mysterious or incredulous (or even heretical or fraudulent to some other Christians) Christian religion to outsiders makes perfect sense to Mormons as the “one true” Christianity. The Mormon “collapse of sacred distance” challenges traditional Christian dualities of the subjective divine and the objective temporal (Givens 2002:245).

**The Role of Religious Experience**

In William James classic psychological study of the varieties of religious experience, the categories of conversion, mysticism including visions and revelations, saintliness, and other subjective experiences are understood by the beholder as a divine occurrence. Religion defined is dependent upon such religious experience: “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men [sic] in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine” (James 1958:46). The religious life “consists of the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto” (63). Mormonism is founded upon Joseph Smith’s religious experiences, giving rise to a systematic and corporate faith, which provides for its followers the program by which to adjust everyday life harmoniously to an unseen order, a “nomos,” as revealed by Heavenly Father. For Mormons, the most common and unifying of all religious
experiences is that of personal revelation, with the paradigmatic “testimony” the most widely shared (Madsen 1992).

The divine of the unseen order may from time to time break into human history and consciousness, as is well known in the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and more recently, Mormonism. Eliade’s explanation for this breaking-through of deity into human history is “the act of manifestation of the sacred . . . something sacred shows itself to us” (Eliade 1987:11). Such a hierophany draws from Rudolph Otto’s numinous or “wholly other” and if the hierophany is specifically of deity, the experience is a theophany. Insofar as deity has revealed himself in these particular western traditions, so too have “theologies, philosophies, and ecclesiastical organizations” arisen therefrom (James 1958:46), beginning in each with an all-important prophet who experiences the theophany. These religious experiences with deity are categorized as an “explanation” in the study of religion (Braun and McCutcheon 2000). Such personal encounters include “extraordinary revelations, epiphanies, and visions which are usually once-off, unique and discontinuous. . . .” (Fitzgerald 2000:125-126). “A sense of the sacred is inseparable from a sense of radical discontinuity, be it temporal, rational, experiential, or a combination of the three. The mystification that is usually a concomitant of such discontinuity is at the very heart of the Christian tradition especially” (Givens 1997:82). Considering traditional Christianity in this definition, the revelations in both Old and New Testament accounts are considered to have been finished with the passing of the apostolic generation. With the Christian canon closed, no more revelations are to be anticipated. In the restoration of Christianity through the Mormons, however, the prophet Joseph Smith received divine notice, beginning with the
First Vision, that continuity of communication from the heavens was no longer foreclosed. And as long as the new “chosen people” kept up their end of the covenant bargain, they were to be assured of continuing revelation.

A second category of religious experience is the “ongoing continuous significance” of everyday life interpreted “in theistic terms.” This concept is a broader construction that “permeates the whole of one’s life through “faith,” through day-by-day commitment, through ritual participation” (Fitzgerald 2000:126). Unlike other Western Monotheistic religions, among the most crucial of divine experiences in the LDS tradition is the resumption of ongoing revelation – prophetic and leadership, and personal. The revelatory communication from the Heavenly Father to the prophet and his counselors is provided on behalf of the global church for governance, administration, and prophecy. Additionally, LDS leadership callings worthily served are attended by the gift of discernment, which is one of the “gifts of the Spirit.” To be utilized discerning good from evil, its “more sensitive operation” provides bishops and stake presidents with the ability to “read the lives and hearts” of their people “and call forth the best within them. . . . The true gift of discernment is often premonitory” (Hartshorn 1992:384).

Personal revelation is provided to the faithful followers who can also expect to hear the ‘still small voice,’ which guides daily life for every worthy Latter-day Saint. This sacred experience is predicated upon a conversion to and testimony of the veracity

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9 The ‘still, small voice’ is mentioned several times in Mormon scriptures, and has become a Mormon idiom. A particular passage often cited in LDS literature is in 1 Kings 19:11-12, with its emphases: “Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.” For Mormons, this passage captures the everyday ordinariness of revelation for those who are worthy to receive it.
of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, resulting in repentance, baptism and the gift of
the Holy Ghost in confirmation. In this sense, religious experience “permeates the
whole of one’s life” through day-by-day commitment and ritual participation to a faith
tradition” (Fitzgerald 2000:126). For Douglas Davies, the Mormons bring “to the
ordinary world a sense of profound significance as passing moments are set within an
immense sweep of divine purpose” (Davies 2000:196-197). The sacred infuses the
“realm of the quotidian” and the banal invades the “realm of the holy” in Joseph Smith’s
“disintegration of sacred distance” (Givens 2007:xv).

A third type of religious experience may be constructed as “some deeply
idealized form of human relationship that connects the particular experience to a wider
system of referents and values . . .” The nation, race, or land are such “principles which
are felt by the collectivity to be self-evident, beyond question, that is, sacred” (Fitzgerald
2000:127). In Mormon teachings, the term Zion has been appropriated from ancient
Israel in notions of sacred nation, race, and land (Berenbaum and Skolnik 2007).10
According to Mormon Doctrine, the term Zion is used variously throughout latter-day
history for the nation, a race or people, and the land, serving as a polyvalent and
shifting metaphor in many cases understood literally in LDS teachings. First, Zion is the
name by which the Lord’s always identifies his chosen people; “the pure in heart.”
Therefore, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is Zion” and is charged with
bringing forth and establishing “the cause of Zion” (McConkie 1966:854, emphasis in

10 In Encyclopedia Judaica, Zion was known originally as (Mount Zion; also Sion, Mountain of Zion; . . .), a
“hill and fortress in Jerusalem.” In the Hebrew Bible and most prominently in the prophet Isaiah, Zion is
variously used metaphorically as Jerusalem captured and renamed as the “City of David;” “the whole of
Jerusalem” was the city; and its inhabitants the “daughter (or virgin) of Zion;” the area or people of Judea;
or various geographies within the city, such as the “Temple Mount” or the “Mountain of Zion.”
the original). Second, Zion is the “City of Holiness” that shall “return in the last days.” Third, since the time of David, Zion is the hill on which Jerusalem is, or will be, built. Fourth, “the New Jerusalem is to be built in Jackson County, Missouri, is also called the City of Zion or Zion.” Fifth, during General Conference April 1844, Joseph Smith announced that “all of North and South America comprise the land of Zion” that is “a land upon which the scattered remnant of Israel is commanded to gather.” Sixth, during the Second Coming, the Lord will “stand upon Mount Zion” identified by revelation as New Jerusalem, Jackson County, Missouri. Seventh, “Paul uses the term Mount Zion to refer to the abode of exalted beings, those who overcome all things and inherit the fulness [sic] of the Father’s kingdom” (McConkie 1966: 854-855; emphases in the original).

Together these many meanings of Zion capture the Mormon story: the covenant people (Zion) are to gather Israel (Zion) to bring forth the kingdom of God (Zion), with the Second Coming in Missouri and in the Americas (Zion) so that all the exalted (Zion) can inherit God’s eternal kingdom (the New Jerusalem, Zion). These definitions have not remained fixed over Mormon history, however. With regard to Zion as the chosen people or race, Armand Mauss’s (2003) work on “changing Mormon conceptions of race and lineage” provides a comprehensive treatment of racialized identities. Traditional LDS doctrine provided a hierarchy of lineages, into which all people were fitted. Ephraim’s most favored lineage as one of Israel’s twelve tribes contains most of today’s Mormons (Mauss 2003:2-3). They stake their claim beside the descendants of Judah, the Jews (Mauss 2003:273). With regard to the Lamanite remnant of ancient Israel in the Americas, shifting official discourse of LDS leaders has
emphasized various meanings through Mormon history, pursuant to external factors such as social prejudices against Indians and a growing body of DNA research, but the Lamanites as a remnant of Israel remains current teaching (Duffy 2008; Mauss 2003). Mormons, to this day call their largest congregations stakes in Zion and their consideration is included later in this study.

Zion’s shifting meanings as a place, involves four phases of Mormon history in which boundary creation and maintenance shifted from the necessary physical city of Zion to individual temples (Taysom 2011). When a literal and distinct physical city in a geographic homeland or promised land became politically untenable, the notion of Zion changed to a reimagining of “temples as homeland” where temple worthy bodies and personal boundaries reinforce metaphorical Zion as a people awaiting Zion to come (Taysom 2011; Golding 2010). For Givens, Zion has four meanings for contemporary Mormons: New Jerusalem of prophecy in Jackson County, Missouri; God’s people; the church as the earthly kingdom of God; and Utah (2004:328). Through layers of revelations responding to and guiding nearly two hundred years of history, a Geertzian (1973) “thick description” of Mormonism yields numerous malleable notions of nation, race, and land, used as a figurative and literal metaphor, many of which are used by participants in this study.

Fitzgerald’s three categories are sufficient for traditional Western Monotheism and have cross-cultural utility, with applicability in the Mormon case. Fitzgerald’s example of discontinuous religious experience, or theophany, became for the LDS the inaugural and unique religious experience – the First Vision. The official LDS website proclaims, “Joseph Smith’s First Vision stands today as the greatest event in world
history since the birth, ministry, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. After centuries of
darkness, the Lord opened the heavens to reveal His word and restore His Church
through His chosen prophet.\textsuperscript{11}

Yet this First Vision sets up the numerous theophanies that would come to
Joseph Smith and his inner circle for the establishment of this particular church. And
beyond the gathering of Zion, the First Vision makes possible the Heavenly Father’s gift
of the Spirit, that of personal revelation for all faithful followers, which are those religious
experiences found in Fitzgerald’s second and third constructions: continuous and
ongoing personal revelations that restore the covenant community with boundaries that
are intentionally defined as Zion or Israel, a nation, race or land. Through the church’s
missionary work building the kingdom of God, personal revelation is accessible to any
person who repents and asks for the Holy Ghost to witness the truth, experiences
conversion, and vows to take responsibility for the sacred covenants by following Jesus
Christ as the messiah through the LDS Church. Beyond Fitzgerald, there is more to be
said about the conduit of revelation uniquely restored in the LDS understanding.

The \textit{Encyclopedia of Mormonism} (Riddle 1992:1225-1228) expands the types of
revelations to include eleven; any or all of these may be available to the prophet for the
purpose of guiding the Church, and as personal revelation to worthy followers who have
been baptized and confirmed, and remain worthy enduring to the end. “A dispensation

\textsuperscript{11}http://jesuschrist.lds.org/josephsmith/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=497679179acbf00VgnVCM1000001f5e340
aRCRD. Accessed February 28, 2011. There were several accounts by Joseph Smith of his First Vision,
recorded after the fact, which are at variance with each other and with historical facts and events of the
time. See \textit{No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith} by Fawn M. Brodie (1995:21-25); \textit{The
Mormon Quest for Refuge} by Marvin S. Hill (1989:9-10); \textit{Religion and Republic: The American
Circumstance} by Martin E. Marty (1987:312-315). For Marty, the four accounts of the First Vision are no
more troubling that the four New Testament gospel accounts. The history of the First Vision in this project
complies with the official church history.
of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a series of personal revelations from God. These revelations may be direct manifestations from God, as in the following typical cases” (1225; emphasis added): theophanies such as Joseph Smith’s First Vision; angelic visitations such as Moroni’s appearance to Joseph Smith disclosing the golden tablets and the revelations through the Urim and Thummim making translation of the Book of Mormon possible; visions and dreams; revealed knowledge from the Heavenly Father including that Jesus is his son; hearing the voice of God, the ‘still, small voice’ of the Holy Spirit, and receipt of the spirit’s gifts; receiving a burning sensation in the bosom as an indication of God’s will; and “manifestations of the light of Christ,” to discern good from evil (1992:1225). Living according to personal revelation comes with three challenges: “distinguishing revelation from God through his Holy Spirit from personal thoughts and desires, and from the influences of Satan;” following the prophet; and “living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (1992:1227). Revelation is so ordinary as to be considered typical and is available to every Mormon, to every worthy member and prophet, alike, with some distinctions.

In the LDS Church the president is officially known as the “Prophet, Seer, and Revelator.” No other church in Western Monotheism has this particular office except those schisms within the Latter-day Saint family. Together these particular titles apprehend in total the direct communicative prophetic experiences of Joseph Smith and his fifteen successors to be transmitted to their followers. Based on biblical understanding and going beyond traditional Christianity in the Smith revelations, the LDS prophet is chosen by God and is the representative of deity on Earth, an inspired teacher of the church, and the custodian of the covenant and the community; as prophet
and seer, he is a visionary who has the capacity of seeing the future and the past, and in the case of Joseph Smith utilized the seer stones to translate the Book of Mormon; and as the prophet, seer, and revelator, acts as the spokesperson for God’s divine will guiding the church in its temporal and spiritual setting. But if revelation was restored to all in the growing movement, Joseph Smith soon realized that “a church full of prophets was holy bedlam.” A subsequent revelation was granted limiting the prophetic appointment of church authority to Joseph Smith and his duly appointed successors (Givens 2007:10). To perform as a prophet, seer, and revelator, one must rely upon the religious imagination to articulate the sacred experience in such a way that believers and potential followers receive and accept the communications as legitimate and prophetic, which will be expanded later in the chapter.

Latter-day Saints are not expected to blindly follow their leadership. Following the prophet requires the gift of discernment, to have spiritual and intellectual verification that the prophet remains true. They are expected to question and reason in their own hearts and minds, praying constantly for guidance in following the prophet. But

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12 Claims to God’s revelations would soon be in question as alternative prophets asserted divine revelations challenging Smith. Before his death in 1844, at least ten splinter groups were founded (Shields 1987:24) and in the past 180 years over 100 dissenting movements have yielded more than fifty extant churches within the Latter-day Saint tradition (xi). See J. Gordon Melton (2003) for a classification of Mormon schisms.

13 See “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet” from President Ezra Taft Benson, which include these instructions: “The prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything; the living prophet is more vital to us than the Standard Works; the living prophet is more important to us than a dead prophet; the prophet will never lead the Church astray; the prophet is not required to have any particular earthly training or diplomas to speak on any subject or act on any matter at any time; the prophet does not have to say “Thus saith the Lord” to give us scripture; the prophet tells what we need to know, not always what we want to know; the prophet is not limited by men’s reasoning; the prophet can receive revelation on any matter, temporal or spiritual; the prophet may advise on civic matters; the two groups who have the greatest difficulty in following the prophet are the proud who are learned and the proud who are rich; the prophet will not necessarily be popular with the world or the worldly; the prophet and his counselors make up the First President – The highest quorum in the church; and the prophet and the
“Mormons by and large believe that God’s revealing of himself to his prophets is just as literal as it ever was” and Mormon scriptures make this acceptance of prophetic leadership a religious imperative, beginning with the prophet Joseph Smith (Givens 2007:14-15).

Rodney Stark’s theory of revelation is based on a comparative assessment of Joseph Smith, Muhammad, Jesus Christ, and Moses, and their familial and socio-historical contexts as prophetic leaders. His central proposition is how “normal people, especially Joseph Smith, can talk to God while retaining a firm grip on rational thought” (Stark 2005c:55). Using Stark’s definition of revelation as “(1) purported communication that (2) is attributed to a supernatural source or entity as God’s word . . .” Shepherd and Shepherd add two sociological criteria: “(3) [revelation] is incorporated in a community of believers’ scriptural canon and/or (4) in official proclamations or policies as the word of God” (Shepherd and Shepherd 2009:735).¹⁴ Prophetic revelations are differentiated between oracular and inspirational.

Oracular revelations are “first-person recitation of God’s literal words” (Shepherd and Shepherd 2009:736, emphasis in the original). Two examples include D&C 21:1-5 given April 6, 1830 in which God named Joseph Smith the Prophet, Seer, and Revelator and restored his church; and D&C 132: 1-4 given July 12, 1843 in which God instructed presidency – the living prophet and the First Presidency – follow them and be blessed – reject them and suffer” (Benson 1981).

¹⁴ Ongoing revelation, the subject of the Shepherds’ work, is a comparative piece on continuing revelation in the LDS Church and the Family International. For new religious movements that claim access to revelation see Stephen C. Taysom’s (2011) Shakers, Mormons, and Religious Worlds. Avery Dulles (1992) expands on his classic study on the models of revelation as applicable to the Quakers in the prophetic line of George Fox (http://www.universalistfriends.org/dulles.html). Accessed February 10, 2013. This is not to suggest that all claims to ongoing revelation are equivalent or understood in the same way; such a comparison is beyond the scope of this work.
Smith on the new and everlasting covenant of plural marriage (745). Inspirational revelations claim “only God’s sanction and guidance” rather than direct recitation of God’s words verbatim (736). Examples include the Woodruff Manifesto overturning the practice of plural marriage given October 6, 1890; and the revelation overturning the prohibition on blacks holding the priesthood given on June 8, 1978 (746). These changing modalities are explained as the maturation of a new religious movement from sect to church. Charismatic prophetic claims, often considered heretical, may launch new religious movements but will later shift to the inspirational bureaucratic mode, which is less sensational and more accommodationist as the movement endures in the larger society (750-751). In either case, those revelations, whether oracular or inspiration, are given alone to LDS prophets, and are understood as divine communications from God for the purpose of guiding the church, and are not privy to the general population of worthy believers.

As a universal appeal of Mormonism, there may be no idea more attractive than having an intimate personal relationship through unmediated communication with God, what Givens calls “dialogic revelation” (Givens 2002:210-239).15 As the most renowned manifestation of revelation in the Mormon tradition, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon sets forth an entirely new understanding of revelation. “The concept of revelation as a personalized, dialogic exchange pervades the Book of Mormon – as well as the life of the Prophet Joseph – like an insistent leitmotif. It is firmly rooted in a radically anthropomorphic theology” (217-218), which was the substance of the First Vision nearly ten years prior to the publishing of the Book of Mormon. Dialogic

15 A debt of gratitude is owed to Noel B. Reynolds for suggesting a study of dialogic revelation in Givens.
revelation is the “province of everyman” rather than belonging only to the province of biblical prophets (220-221), as heretofore understood in the Western Monotheistic tradition. The Book of Mormon is replete in numerous examples of revelation, from answering the ultimate questions of existence to replies that are “quotidien, pragmatic, and at times almost banal in their mundane specificity” (225). Lay Mormons, just like their prophetic counsel, understand quite literally: ‘ask and you shall receive’ and there need be no strikes of lightening or earthquakes in this every day, yet sacred, experience. Despite the democratic openings of dialogic revelation and the potential for dubious revelatory claims, Givens insists that “it is essential to point out that for present-day Mormons personal revelation is circumscribed by principles of ecclesiastical stewardship or jurisdiction” (Givens 2002:224; emphasis in the original). According to the sixth church president Joseph F. Smith, all member revelations must be in “harmony with” the church and its authorities, and pertain “only to “themselves and their families …” (Givens 2002:225). For Seshachari revelation is the “cohesive element in international Mormonism” (1980).

For faithful Latter-days Saints like Givens (an interdisciplinary historian), then, this understanding of ongoing revelation is perfectly rational and real in the Joseph Smith teachings that there are no divisions between the divine and the temporal, the realm of the gods and the human realm, where “Joseph rewrote conventional dualisms as thoroughgoing monism” (Givens 2007:xv). Therefore, divine occurrences need not be articulated as metaphorical, but as the guiding experiences of daily Mormon life. On a spiritual continuum from pre-mortal to earthly probation to eternal progression the Mormon worldview collapses the polarities on the western divide between the sacred
and the profane (Givens 2007:xv). Not a mystical, once-in-a-lifetime serendipitous event to be metaphorized away, religious experience for the Mormons is purposeful and sought-after, a given reality of covenant life from the Heavenly Father through the Holy Ghost, a gift never to be taken for granted or misunderstood as only metaphor.

The Role of Metaphor

For Mircea Eliade, religion is expressed in symbol and myth, or metaphors, due to the “human inability to express the ganz andere; all that goes beyond man’s natural experience, language is reduced to suggesting by terms taken from that experience” (Eliade 1987:10). It is true that Joseph Smith’s theophanies and angelic visitations are beyond the natural experiences of most men and yet present a challenge to the Western Monotheistic understanding of religious experience as mysterious and sublime. Because ongoing revelation is an ordinary occurrence for faithful Mormons, the distance between deity and everyman is erased. If the distance is conceivably gone then so too is the problem of communicating the divine, which is no longer seen as mysterious or ineffable.

For Samuel Hill, the Mormon “radical restoration” movement compresses rather than collapses both vertical distance and horizontal distance. Vertical compression draws closely together “heaven and earth, God and people in the world” (Hill 1988:234). Collapse of sacred distance goes too far for Hill, and he is right; collapse will occur with the Second Coming when Christ is to reign on earth for a millennium and until that time there remains some separation, however porous the boundary compressed. Compression with a very porous boundary comports better to the Mormon notion of the “veil.” “Not only does the veil keep us from remembering our premortal past, it also keeps God, his angels, and their activities hidden from our sight” (Hafen 1991). Without
the veil of separation, humans could see all godly activities; with the veil, God controls what humans are privy to. The purpose of the separation is earthly probation during which the acquisition of all necessary skills to become a god tests the worthiness of each member. Horizontal compression is “preoccupied with the ancient and the current” and “repudiates all intervening history, rarely as fact, but as holding any theological significance” (Hill 1988:232-234) as if one foot stands in primordial times and the other in these latter days. In Mormon belief, “the Church of Jesus Christ was removed from the earth when direct communication between divinity and humanity ceased at the end of the apostolic age” (Shipps 1988:182-183), after which nearly 2000 years of Christian history is renounced as apostasy. When temporal and spatial categories are compressed or collapsed, historically dissected, and re-appropriated the use of metaphors helps make these changes comprehensible.

The metaphor is not a linguistic device that reduces or misrepresents the holy; rather it is intended to be expansive for meaning and understanding, and helps to explain changing conceptions of religious experience over the course of a religion’s history. Jan Shipps recalls the importance of metaphors in Mormonism as “recapitulations of episodes in Hebrew history.” Shipps draws from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson: “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Shipps 1987:61). Rather than an extraordinary or peripheral literary device, metaphors are embedded in our very experiences, condition how we think and what we do, and are pervasive in daily life – they are “imaginative rationality” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:193). Even as we may be largely unaware of their operation within our conceptual apparatus, metaphors facilitate the arts
of communication and understanding; they can be literal or figurative. Metaphors, then, are central to the human action of making and articulating the meaning of experience, individually and collectively. *The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:5, emphasis in the original).

The history of Mormonism is steeped in metaphors, both literal and figurative, and ever transforming, through “acts of appropriation” from ancient Israel and apostolic Christianity. Douglas Davies calls the early church “Mormon-Israel” and today’s church “Christian-Mormonism” (Davies 2010:1). As much as early Christians reiterated, reinterpreted, recapitulated and ritually re-enacted Israel’s covenant story, so too have Mormons. “This time, however, reiteration, reinterpretation, recapitulation and ritual recreation of the significant events in Israel’s past and the significant events in the story of Christianity were both required” (Shipps 1987:54, emphasis in the original). The restoration of the original covenant could occur because the heavens were reopened for the purpose of prophecy. Later Shipps describes this appropriation of Israelite lineage as being transformative, from symbolic to literal in the bestowal of patriarchal blessings upon each Mormon as their “birthright membership in Abraham’s family . . .” (Shipps 2000b:293).

But Mormonism is more than an appropriation of ancient Israel and apostolic Christianity. According to McConkie in *Mormon Doctrine* the “common sectarian notion that the day of Pentecost is the birthday of the Christian Church is a false heresy. Whenever the gospel has been on earth, it has been taught and administered in and through Christ’s Church,” which is today the LDS Church, the kingdom of God on earth
(McConkie 1966:133-134). As the eternal church of Jesus Christ, present in the first dispensation of Adam (the first man), followed by the dispensations of Enoch (first man to ascend to heaven without dying and attributed with Zion), Noah (rescued humanity from the Great Flood, Abraham (the father of the faith), Moses (the law giver), and reenacted by the first generation of Christ’s twelve apostles, the restoration of all things is in the seventh and final dispensation revealed to Joseph Smith in our latter-days.\textsuperscript{16}

As all things primordial, from proto-Hebraic times through apostolic Christianity restored in these latter days, the Mormons understand and experience “one kind of thing in terms of another,” or experience all things restored in other terms.

The missionaries of this church play a pivotal role in building God’s kingdom by proclaiming the gospel around the world, teaching the restoration. To become a participant in this restoration project of the eternal church requires a conversion testimony and baptism, a necessary given in the “ritual functioning of Mormon culture.” Referring to the all-important Mormon testimony as the “high mass” moment, David Knowlton, a Mormon anthropologist, acknowledges the utility of metaphors (Knowlton 1991:27). Each new potential member of the church is asked by the missionaries to seek a testimony as confirmation of truth revealed by the Spirit. For example, when referring to personal revelation and testimony, they often invoke terms such as ‘a whisper’ or ‘the Spirit’ or the ‘still, small voice’ and various ‘feelings’ associated with a confirmation of truth.

This testimony is the quintessential validation of two universal truths that are at once historically metaphorical but concrete in consequence: the restored truth of the

\textsuperscript{16} Instructions on these seven dispensations were included in my first and second discussion lessons by the active missionaries during my fieldwork in February 2008.
church of Jesus Christ and the truth of continuing revelation to worthy members. Once received, it is expected that the new member will ‘bear her testimony’ to the community. Expressed through metaphor and ritual, the personal experience of the Spirit made public consolidates the new Mormon into the community and its sacred narrative myth (Knowlton 1991:20-27). “For Mormons, the Joseph Smith Story is our formative myth, and it is pregnant with most fundamental LDS beliefs – prayer and personal revelation, prophets and authority, truth and apostasy” (24). The testimony’s great strength is that it is understood as a personal revelation, spontaneously inspired by the Spirit rather than scripted, giving it unquestionable veracity, and thereby legitimating the truth of the church. “This [recitation] reinforces the Church’s privilege as his [the testimony bearer’s] dominant ideology and makes it resistant to other modes [of ideologies]” (25). Missionaries claim the more they share their testimony, the stronger theirs becomes. And, as Marty explains the hermeneutics of the testimony, it is on the transmission of the testimony that the one who hears decides “faith or unfaith,” truth or untruth, of the events to which the testifier refers (Marty 1987:319). Irrespective of any cultural or demographic differences, such religious experiences “enhance the underlying unity of the members of the Church, enabling them to feel one with each other and with the prophets” (Madsen 1992:1208). Whatever the background of the new member, the truth of the church is internalized uniting the new member's story with the Joseph Smith story, subsuming individual experiences and creeds “under unifying symbols” which reinforce “the sacred authority of the Church hierarchy” and yield a “community unified by common mythology and speech forms, by a common testimony” (Knowlton 1991:25).
The restoration of the covenant is a restoration of a sacred canopy, which can be understood in various metaphorical ways in the LDS tradition. For example, to say that religion is a sacred canopy is to understand religion through imagining a protective edifice above and what that edifice provides and how it works. Berger’s sacred canopy, supported by plausibility structures, is a metaphorical or literal construct to describe religion as protective against a tenuous existence. A canopy can be as narrowly defined as a suspended covering that protects or covers (like a tent such as Isaiah’s tents from which stakes take their name), and or as broadly overarching as the atmosphere (it is a structure that allows for movement and is taken for granted, or goes unspoken).

First, the LDS religion is revealed from a transcendent Heavenly Father – a revelation (the communicative conduit) of the restored gospel of the eternal or primordial church of Jesus Christ to prophets – the gift of prophecy reopened. Second, the canopy is understood as the renewed covenant – ancient Israelite, Jewish, and Christian – or sacred community based on Ephraim’s lineage. The covenant community serves as a protective structural boundary that unites obedient members as this dispensation’s covenant people where they find protection from a tenuous existence. Third, from the prophetic headquarters in centralized Salt Lake City to the global periphery the restored gospel covenant is mobilized by missionaries and global broadcasting. Fourth, as the covenant people they are to build geographic congregations under Isaiah’s tents, or raise up stakes in Zion as they bring the restoration of the gospel to humankind, living and dead, wherever they are situate.
The LDS method for establishing Zion is the three-fold mission, which also depends on the use of metaphors: to ‘proclaim the gospel’ is to proselytize or teach, recruiting new members to Mormonism; to ‘perfect the saints’ is to become disciples who keep all covenants while continually progressing in this earthly probation toward eternal deification, and ‘to redeem the dead’ is to invite the deceased into the Mormon religion through baptism and other temple ordinances. The church of Jesus Christ, understood as the one true religion, is arguably a protective sacred canopy or covenant from above, as revealed by a transcendent God, as “one kind of thing in terms of another.” Through its three-fold mission, the LDS intend to bring the entire cosmos into the new and everlasting covenant in Zion. To think of converting the entire cosmos to the primordial church of Jesus Christ is an expansive, and perhaps audacious, exercise in “imaginative rationality” necessarily using metaphors to convey meaning, possibilities, and comprehension.

Yet for Givens, Smith’s radical “reformulation of traditional categories” into all things spiritual “made it impossible for his followers to metaphorize such biblically ordained imperatives or divorce them from the central pursuits of personal and community life” (Givens 2007:13). According to Givens, what appear as Mormon metaphorical appropriations of ancient Hebraic-Christian identity and experience – to be of Ephraim’s lineage, to receive revelations, renew covenants, restore the priesthood, write a sacred canon, experience exiles, erect temples, gather Zion, and prepare for the millennium – are instead understood by the LDS as rational and literal divine imperatives. Mormonism like the Western Monotheistic tradition in which it is situate,
and which it subsumes as the entire Hebraic and Christian cosmology into one sacred entity, is replete with complex and paradoxical metaphors, both figurative and literal.

**The Role of Rationality**

Rationality is a contested term, having attended the rise of European Enlightenment, and is no less disputed in the study of religion, and in the study of Mormonism. The long term problem for religions generally has been an assessment of irrationality by western scientific standards, and religious experience such as revelation in Mormonism is not immune. The Descartian premise of rationalism is doubt, employing the “mathematical, analytical, [and] logical” to deductive reasoning (Cox 2006:11-12). With lines firmly drawn between the objective, rational empirical and the subjective, irrational intangible, dichotomies in Western Monotheism have been reinforced in the sacred and profane, or supernatural and natural. Because categories in the study of religion such as various experience including revelation, belief, behavior, conversion, mysticism, and rituals, among others, often fail to comport to the rigor of scientific investigation, they have been dismissed as irrational or non-rational. While the Enlightenment has conditioned thinking in such a way as to privilege rationalism together with empiricism in the scientific method over other epistemologies, the art of reasoning, thoughtful deliberation, and decision making has evolved with humanity as the social construction of knowledge, which is now recognized as situated and culturally embedded (Haraway 1988). As a critical term in the study of religion (Taylor 1998), Paul Stoller discusses universalist, relativist, phenomenological, and embodied rationalities, all of which are applicable in Mormonism.
Universalists agree upon universal principles as rational that are not subject to historical socio-cultural contexts. In the study of religion, a universalist approach assumes the existence of an “ultimate reality, the truth of which could be established through scientific procedures and logical processes independent of context” (Stoller 1998:243). The Levi-Strauss project on kinship analogized to grammatical structure provides for Stoller an example of a universal anthropological theory of marriage and kinship; irrespective of cultural context, “[i]n his scheme the diversity of local nuance is lost in the unity of universal systematicity” (246). Science itself arose out of the western epistemological tradition and went universal. Relativists assert the diversity of rationality as culturally embedded or particular. Relativist approaches include those concerned with specific ecological underpinnings for the emergence of cultural constructions. Evans-Pritchard’s Zande work is “the first scholarly treatise to consider a set of non-western beliefs as something more than a jumble of irrational superstitions” (Stoller 1998:247), demonstrating the sophistication of particular rationalities.

Phenomenological rationality provides “one path out of the unproductive debate” between the universalists and relativists by arguing for the “lived immediacy” of everyday experience. In the sociology of Alfred Schutz, “the description of social reality involves neither a singular intellectualist move to transform sets of beliefs and behaviors into universally verifiable propositions that mirror reality nor the naïve relativist move to accept the complete incommensurability of differing systems of belief” (Stoller 1998:249, emphasis in the original). For Schutz “the individual’s interpretation of any event entails the apprehension of multiple realities,” the most critical of which is the “natural” attitude “of socially conditioned mechanisms we use to experience the immediacy of everyday
life” – the “lifeworld” (249-250). If critics disapprove of the emphasis placed on subjective experience as “a descent into the solipsistic subjectivism of the autonomous subject” (251), perhaps “one of the most essential aspects of phenomenology for an approach to the study of non-Western [or all] religions is its emphasis on embodiment” (251). Rather than being merely an object of study, the body is a “lived-phenomenological body, enacted for others, and enacted for the self” (Riis and Woodhead 2010:26). Vásquez argues for a phenomenological “non-reductive materialist” theory of religion that maps the “generalized neglect of all things material in the study of religion” – the “polyvalence of embodiment,” its practices and emplacements (Vásquez 2011:11-12). This work demonstrates that all rationalities – universalist, relativist, phenomenological, and embodied – are interrelated in a religion, as in the Mormon case.

In Mormon thought, revelation is “fundamentally rational” (White 2008:25). “LDS teaching affirms the supreme authority of divine revelation. However, revelation is not understood as an impediment to rational inquiry but as the framework within which the natural human desire to know can most vigorously and fruitfully be exercised” (Hancock 1992:1192). Therefore, however paradoxical, subjective or relative to a specific time and place, if received by an obedient and worthy member, revelation works together with universalist, relativist, phenomenological, and embodied rationalities yielding an ideal Mormon rationality in step with prophetic leadership. “An epistemology combining reason, empiricism, and revelation, though not without problems, was perfectly consistent with the metaphysics and theology articulated by Joseph Smith in the last
few years of his life” (White 2008:24), as successive revelations enriched and matured his intellectual understanding of the implications of the restoration.

Entrusted with the restored gospel and formation of its church, Joseph Smith immediately dispatched missionaries to proclaim this gospel for the particular purpose of gathering Zion; later discourse in building up Zion became universal with global missionaries. Each missionary called in this long lineage of missionaries ‘teaches by the Spirit’ – a visceral feeling – narrating the Joseph Smith story of the restoration in lessons that utilize both the gift of the Spirit and the rational intellect, through prayerful inquiry and rational study.

From its inception, the distance between the supernatural and the natural has been compressed in Mormonism, problematizing categories such as religious experience, metaphor, and rationality (Givens 1997, 2002, 2007). These categories, based in western thought, demonstrate privileged Christian theological history where “distance is the guarantor of the sacred’s status as sacred” (Givens 1997:82). Conversely for the LDS, all knowledge is eternal and universal with God in “continuity between the natural and the divine realms, a continuity founded in part on the eternal importance of human understanding” (Hancock 1992:1193). Joseph Smith’s First Vision, included in the first missionary lesson, provides an important example of a theological compression of sacred distance in the understanding of Godhead. For Otto, nowhere is the process of rationalization more evident than in the very idea of deity, which, as the mysterious ‘wholly other’ can only be understood as subject to anthropomorphism – an otherwise incomprehensible God articulated through the metaphor of man.
It is essential to every theistic conception of God, and most of all to the Christian, that it designates and precisely characterizes deity by the attributes spirit, reason, purpose, good will, supreme power, unity, selfhood. The nature of God is thus thought of by analogy with our human nature of reason and personality… (Otto 1958:1).

For Latter-day Saints, the First Vision of Joseph Smith in the wooded grove provided more than an answer regarding errant American sectarianism. It also provided absolute and concrete revelation of the anthropomorphic and corporeal nature of God and his son, Jesus Christ – both of whom appeared bathed in a pillar of light over the youngster’s head. The two “personages” in “glorified bodies” of flesh and bones gave evidence of their prior human existence. This vision provided clear testimony that the incomprehensible, inexplicable Christian Trinity was in error. For the LDS, the First Vision is the “beginning point, the fountainhead, of the restoration in this dispensation” (Backman 1992:515). The prayerful and rational inquiry of the First Vision, therefore, turned out to be prophetic for what would later become LDS doctrine: the anthropomorphic and non-Trinitarian Godhead, theomorphic man, the atonement of God’s son Jesus Christ, continuing revelation, the forthcoming restoration of the gospel and Christ’s church, and a renewal of “the witness of the Hebrew prophets that visions are not the least but the most reliable mortal access to the divine; that the majesty, glory, and power of God are “beyond description”; that the biblical record of face-to-face communication with God is more than a strained metaphor” (Backman 1992:516). This

17 The Christological significance of the First Vision was provided for me by one key participant who explained that God’s very first revelation to Joseph Smith would necessarily be the nature of the Godhead since it may have been the Christological crisis that attended the Great Apostasy of the early Christians. This informant’s father, several years prior, had instructed me that the incomprehensible Trinity had been a stumbling block for him in his prior Christian faith, which had asked him to just accept the mystery of the Godhead. Dissatisfied as an intellectual man, his conversion testimony of the First Vision provided an explanation of the Godhead, which was finally rational to him and gave impetus to his conversion. For further information on the Great Apostasy see Noel B. Reynolds (2005).
multi-layered definition of the First Vision simultaneously expresses God as beyond description while it discounts the utility of metaphor.

Paradoxically, the revelation of the First Vision rationally resolves for Mormons the incomprehensible nature of a triune deity through corporeal anthropomorphism (a metaphor) while the religious experience of such a subjective revelation challenges objective rationality. Joseph Smith’s embodied and rational quest for religious truth yielded a specific vision of the Godhead embodied, promising the restoration forthcoming through the gift of prophecy entrusted to a new covenant people. For Givens, it is “easy to see why his [Joseph Smith’s] personal encounter with a conversing Deity would ground his own sense of epistemological certainty” (Givens 2007:22).

Nearly two hundred years after his actual experiences, all Mormons recall Smith’s revelations as manifestations of divine communication for the purpose of restoring his church – and as revealed to Joseph Smith, so too the promise of ongoing revelation was held out to every potential believer. In fact, it is irrational to the LDS that traditional Christianity operates without the benefit of ongoing revelation – a closed canon is incomprehensible to Mormons. No deity could rationally expect his church to prosper and grow universally without the ability of its leaders and members to rationally communicate with God through revelation. “Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none” (Joseph Smith in Givens 2002:185). Therefore, rational revelation comes from a rational God. As the LDS website asserts, the First Vision is “the greatest event in world history” since Jesus Christ, which phenomenon subsumes all rationalities – universalist, relativist, phenomenological, and embodied.
Issues in Boundary Maintenance

Throughout their history, the Mormons have held in productive tension the boundaries between insider and outsider status, although along the sweep of nearly two hundred years those boundaries have shifted (Taysom 2011; Mauss 1994; Moore 1986). For the Mormons, the covenant revealed provides their boundaries. Their understanding of themselves as the restored covenant community necessitates boundaries that are adaptable but contained. In particular, Thomas O’Dea’s historical sociology of the Mormons identified revelation with prophetic charisma in tension with secular rationality, requiring the Weberian routinization and rationalization of charisma, or in O’Dea’s words, the “containment of charisma” (O’Dea 1957:156-160). The prophet or “individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment” . . . and who by claiming “definite revelations” is able to exert “his power simply by virtue of his personal gifts,” which establishes his authority by using his religious experience as legitimating (Weber 1993 [1922]:46-47). O’Dea writes that Smith, having claimed miraculous revelations even prior to his founding of the church and despite challenges to his authority, necessarily “concentrated the charisma of prophecy upon himself” in several important ways: only he could receive prophetic revelation; only he received revelations regarding the various roles of other rising members thereby limiting their power; and he consolidated ecclesiastical power by holding more than one of the highest offices. In so doing, he was the first “prophet, seer and revelator” as well as the president of the High Priesthood (O’Dea 1957:157-159). In these offices, Joseph Smith was the legitimate authority responsible for rationalizing or systematizing prophetic ideas giving meaning and order to cosmic conceptions; implying “normative control or sanctions” intellectually and existentially;"
and motivating commitment to the system as a whole (Parsons in Weber 1993 [1922]:xlii-xlili).

When successful, the prophet wins to himself followers, apostles and disciples (Weber 1993 [1922], p. 60), as in the Mormon case. As followers gathered around the prophet the cycle of revelation and reason were reinforced in the new religious movement’s prophetic legitimacy, where successive revelations established particular institutions such as the office of the prophet, a sacred canon, the priesthood of all males, the gathering in Zion, and later plural marriage as all things fulfilled. In this way, revelation was continually made rational by restoration rhetoric, through an “ethical prophet” who “thinks of himself as an instrument of a divine will, as having a mission to promulgate an order for others which expresses that will” (Parsons in Weber 1993 [1992]:xlv-xlvi). In the routinization of a prophetic movement, “the prophet himself or his disciples secure the permanence of his preaching and the congregation’s distribution of grace, hence insuring the economic existence of the enterprise and those who man it, and thereby monopolizing as well the privileges reserved for those charged with religious functions” (Weber 1993 [1922]:60-61). Developing a bureaucratic hierarchy further contains charisma, making routine and rational such religious experiences as revelation, or “the domestication of the supernatural under the knowing supervision of church authority” (Davies 2000:175).

The church hierarchy maintains institutional control of community boundaries in at least three ways: “define who may claim to be Mormon, that is, establish the appropriate boundaries for being Mormon; reaffirm their claim to be the exclusive bearers of the tradition; and reestablish control over the Mormon community” (White
2008:29). In other words, the leaders maintain the covenant. First, institutional control of appropriate boundaries is necessary for a church that now dispatches an annual approximate 50,000 missionaries to various cultures around the globe. The charismatic impulse of missionaries is contained by immersion in the mandatory instruction of the Missionary Training Center where novice missionaries learn the teaching parameters of the restoration narrative. Once in the mission field, pairs of missionaries are closely scrutinized by one another, by their peer zone leaders, and by the mission president in a tightly circumscribed mission design. Investigators are invited into baptism and fellowshipped, or acculturated, according to strict Mormon community boundaries.

Second, institutional control of the Mormon tradition was, in O’Dea’s concern, an inherent tension where intellectual life is esteemed and necessary for eternal progression, but constrained by orthodox authority. Guarding the tradition, and third, exercising authoritarian control over the Mormon community has met some historical resistance in two spheres: those who claim alternative prophetic revelation leading to schisms in the LDS family, and among intellectuals whose scholarship has run up against Mormon orthodoxy. Institutional control is vested in the LDS hierarchy of fifteen men, “where the most important [church] decisions are made,” is constituted by the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles (Quinn 1997:1). In this bureaucratic structure, charisma is rationalized by “the twin charges of the apostleship” through “special charismatic witness” and “the requirement of unanimity” (1-20). Despite tensions and conflicts along the path to unanimity, “If ye are not one, ye are not mine” (Quinn 1997:7). All final decisions are “revelation by definition . . .” (20). Once decisions are handed down to local stake, ward and branch members, they are asked to ‘sustain’ the
leadership through a vote, “a perfunctory ratification ritual” whereby rank and file members have no genuine role in decision-making (White 2008:26). It is through the institutional LDS Church by its centralized hierarchy that all decisions, doctrines, policies, and ultimately, all rationalities, are ideally transformed and sustained by the membership into the universal “one in Christ.” Maintaining institutional control of a growing global missionary movement that esteems and constrains intellectual development and personal revelation results in “a democracy of participation within the context of hierarchical organization and authoritarian operation” for O’Dea, or more accurately, “highly participatory but hardly democratic” for White (White 2008:26).

While Mormon rationality is universally available to all people through missionary work, it is particularly relative to Mormon teaching. No other Christian church has this particular missionary message within the covenant design. Inviting others unto Christ, the missionaries share this unique synthesis of revelation and reason, where Mormon rationality empowered by revelation is the “cohesive element in international Mormonism” (Seshachari 1980), conformed by obedience to the authority’s teachings. Once an investigator receives the all-important testimony, repents, and in the event of a conversion, undergoes baptism by bodily immersion in water and confirmation by the laying on of hands upon the head follow. Through these requisite ordinances, believers are assured the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, and all the spiritual gifts of the Holy Ghost promised to the covenant people. These transformations in an individual’s conversion experience are conducted between missionaries and converts whose practices, beliefs, and situations were phenomenologically embodied “where speech, vision, gesture, touch, and sound combine” (Vásquez 2011:321). By the gift of
discernment through the power of personal revelation new members synthesize religious experience with rationality, ideally comporting beliefs, behaviors and choices, and thinking to the new religious community.

As belonging to a new covenant community, the new convert experiences along with Mormon rationality a new Mormon identity. The testimony makes sense of the conversion experience as the moment of embodied spiritual intensity that unites the convert’s particular history and rationality with the life and experience of Joseph Smith. Ghanian pioneer Elder Kissi’s testimony is just like that of Joseph Smith’s as he recalled encountering numerous other churches, “He [Joseph Smith] went out looking for which church is true so that he would join it. . . . I'm not looking for miracles. I am looking for Jesus Christ and His Church. Anybody can perform miracles. . . . The Church is true and the gospel is true. We will be with it until we change our status from mortality and join it again in the life hereafter” (Kissi 2004:313-317). “This new identity, as the argument for Mormon ethnicity presupposes, assumed precedence over previous national and racial identities, being a Mormon became the most salient feature in the self-definition of the individual” (White 1995:89), or a new “master status” (Phillips 2005; Shepherd and Shepherd 2001; White 2008) or dominant ideology (Knowlton 1991). One Dominican man shared in his conversion story that “I was born to be a Mormon” (Lasater 2003: 137) in which case national identity was subordinated to Mormon identity. But where a new Mormon master status collides with an existing master status such as homosexual, incompatibility “can often be intense and difficult to manage” (Phillips 2005:10). Rationality is a matter of paradox in our intellectual capacities to exercise varying rationalities and identities in creative tension or synthesis. For the
Latter-day missionaries in this study, all rationalities will ideally be resolved as one in the universal Mormon community, irrespective of particular cultural differences.

Charismatic witness in the global missionary enterprise appears surprisingly well contained; missionaries do not appear to go off message, and they are admonished to ‘return with honor’ to their homes at the conclusion of their missions. Once missionaries return from service, higher education and marriage are the very first priorities, beginning families of active members. Rational inquiry, chastened by obedience and perseverance, enhances all phases of Mormon life, in the family, in missionary work, in pursuit of education, and as a people in pursuit of eternal progress. Mormons are well known for their attainment of higher education, for men and women, alike, as work toward eternal progress. The more intelligence gained during this earthly probation, the better, as it will attend them in the resurrection and into exaltation. In this ideal synthesis of reason and revelation, there would seem to be no tensions between the two, and among these participants there is scant, if any, evidence of any contradiction between subjective experience and objective rationalism. But for those seeking higher education among them many former missionaries, especially in the social sciences and humanities who become participants in the “Mormon intelligentsia,” there can be difficult boundaries to negotiate and still adhere to orthodoxy.\(^1\)

\(^1\) O. Kendall White has written extensively on this Mormon intellectual subculture, which lies on a continuum between apologists and apostates with “cultural Mormons” and non-practicing Mormons in between (White 2008:30-40). The infamous September Six excommunicated in 1993 included feminists and scholars, writing on topics such as the heavenly mother and post-manifesto plural marriages within the church. The vibrant “liberal Mormon subculture” provides evidence that the hierarchical church and the community at large are no longer “coterminous” as they have been for most of Mormon history (White 1995:84-91).
Duffy delineates six approaches to Mormons take to scholarship: “anti-contention,” apologists, anti-intellectual, orthodox, revisionist, and progressive orthodox (Duffy 2004:22-55), all views of which are suggested by participants in this project. Anti-contentionists argue for ignoring criticism of the faith. Apologetics respond directly to criticisms of the religion, often employing intellectual polemics. For anti-intellectuals, reason and scholarship are “irrelevant to questions of faith” (29-30). Orthodox scholarship is based on the assumption of LDS faith claims, but it not necessarily defensive and employs the intellectual methods of mainstream scholarship. Practitioners of orthodox scholarship refer to it rather as “faithful scholarship” (Duffy 2007a:64). For Duffy, orthodox scholarship is the middle ground between defensive positions and accommodations with mainstream scholars and Christianity.

Duffy sees a current trend toward “progressive orthodoxy” which in some scholarship is published on the church’s newsroom online (Duffy 2004:42). Progressive orthodoxy however, differs from “liberal Mormonism” insofar as orthodoxy relies on LDS truth claims where revisionist or liberals may challenge the faith (42). Duffy’s continuum is especially helpful in this work since most of the participants are not scholars but have both implicit and explicit views about scholarship.

Additionally, Jan Shipps’s continuum of Mormon piety can be juxtaposed with the concentric circles suggested earlier (Peterson 1997). Working beyond stereotypical monolithic Mormons, she employs a seven-part continuum: “fundamentalist polygamists—superorthodox—orthodox/active—“cultural” or “ethnic”—“Jack Mormon” nonpractitioners—hostile “Jack Mormons”—outright anti-Mormons” (2001b:152-154). Most of the participants in this study are in Shipps’s continuum either among the
superorthodox as certain in the absolute historical truth of all things Mormon, or orthodox/active saints who are not threatened by the workings of scholarship. These are the Mormons who comprise the core nucleus of Mormons who take responsibility for growing their church. Second, even under the most open and inviting of interview environments, most of these participants are generally anti-contentionist, choosing rather to politely dismiss, skirt, or ignore a controversial discussion than engage it.

David Knowlton calls this dilemma the “politics of the unspeakable.” Knowlton, removed from his professorial position at BYU for writing on terrorism and LDS missionary work in South America, explains that the problem, according to Apostle James E. Faust, is not differences of opinion between academics (or others) and the church; but “rather, the crux lies in the public expression of those differences. Apostasy lies in breaching the boundaries of the unspeakable, as if such were a desecration.” For Knowlton, the “central issue of morality, and therefore Church membership and salvation, lies in giving voice publicly to what should not be said” – “the politics of the unspeakable” (Knowlton 1997:49-50). These paradoxical tensions explored by Givens – promoting intellectual freedom and individual agency within authoritarian constraints and “intellectual certitude with intellectual insatiability” – will continue to reside within Mormonism. “One test of a religion’s intellectual vitality is the capacity to tolerate dissent and difference while maintaining orthodoxy” (Givens 2007:220).19 For

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19 The containment of dissident scholarship is not unique to the Latter-Day Saints. The Catholic tradition has an ancient scholastic tradition dating to the first and second centuries in Ignatius of Antioch and Clement of Rome; Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, respectively, and better known to the larger world through Augustine and Aquinas. However, the Magisterium is responsible for protecting the boundaries of doctrine. For the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, metaphorizing the sacred is problematic as well, in their recent public criticism of a new book by professor and theologian Sister Elizabeth A. Johnson. The USCCB (Statement on Quest for the Living God 2011) sees its obligation “to state publicly that the doctrine of God presented in Quest for the Living God does not accord with
Shipps, writing on LDS women scholars, the church sees itself in a “defensive program with which the church guards its fortress against heterodoxy by exercising close oversight of public discourse about sensitive dimensions of LDS history, public conversation about the meaning of scripture, and unauthorized explications of dogma” (Shipps 2000c:199).

Ultimately, the church will always protect the restored gospel and covenant teachings, vigilant for possible heresy and apostasy\(^{20}\) – whether inside or outside the academy. Welch (2004) points out that within the first two centuries of Christianity, the primitive church was on its way to apostasy for a failure to follow the apostles. He cites Tvedtnes, “individual apostasy sometimes led to mass rejection of church leaders, affirming the validity of Brigham Young’s warning that public criticism of one’s bishop is the first step to apostasy” (2004:1). But church leadership has not always been unanimous, nor could it be expected to be (Quinn 1997).\(^{21}\) There have been Mormon authentic Catholic teaching on essential points” (21). For the bishops, the essential points are: first, her work presents first a “false alternative” on the idea of God (1). It does not uphold the Catholic theological foundation of the mystery of God as taught by the Magisterium, but rather radically reconstructs the idea of God; second, it offers a “false presupposition” in asserting that “all names for God are metaphors” of human construction for “social and political utility” (6).

\(^{20}\) In Mormonism heresy is generally conflated with apostasy within the community. “Latter-day Saints believe that apostasy occurs whenever an individual or community rejects the revelations and ordinances of God, changes the gospel of Jesus Christ, or rebels against the commandments of God, thereby losing the blessings of the Holy Ghost and of divine authority” (Compton 1992:56). Heresy is based “more on what a member says or does than on what he or she believes” (Bradford 1992:1054). What a member says and does in concert with adherence to the faith, in fact, involves acting on beliefs and doctrines. Members undergo periodic interviews in which they are asked if they follow church tenets as set forth in the Articles of Faith; sustaining the church leadership; adherence to the laws of chastity, Word of Wisdom, and tithing; participating in active callings, family, prayer, and righteousness; and the presence of a personal testimony. “Those who break their covenants or whose conduct brings discredit upon the Church may be dealt with in a disciplinary procedure” (Bradford 1992:1055) with the ultimate goal of assisting the member in repentance and return to fellowship.

\(^{21}\) Quinn provides massive research on the church hierarchy, including the formation by President Ezra Taft Benson of the “Strengthening the Members Committee” which maintains files on church members considered too liberal or critical (1997:312-313). Benson was a notorious public supporter of the John Birch Society; however, his two counselors and successive presidents of the church, Gordon B. Hinckley
leaders who were “liberally inclined,” as Givens cites Apostle Hugh B. Brown at BYU in 1969: “[P]reserve, then, the freedom of your mind in education and in religion, and be unafraid to express your thoughts and to insist upon your right to examine every proposition. We are not so much concerned with whether your thoughts are orthodox or heterodox as we are that you shall have thoughts” (Givens 2007:226). The motto of BYU is: “The glory of God is intelligence.”

Most of the participants in this study are products of higher education as well, often BYU.

Errant scholarship is one dissident matter; alternative claims to revelation are most contentious within religious movements. In Latter-day history, there are estimates of more than 100 different movements, of which more than 50 are still extant (Shields 1987:xi). One of the main reasons for the various dissensions is alternative revelation. J. Gordon Melton states that Joseph Smith’s many revelations “built into the system a ready-made impetus to schism” (Melton 2003:133-137). Where the Latter-day Saint Family finds unity in the First Vision of Joseph Smith’s as the fountainhead of the tradition, the great schism was caused by his prophetic revelation on plural wives and the attendant crisis of succession.

The competing prophetic voices on contemporary polygamous practices are an ongoing source of division and embarrassment for the contemporary church. For those who call themselves ‘fundamentalist’ LDS, or FLDS, the Salt Lake City church has fallen and Thomas S. Monson, respectively, departed from Birch support as a “troublesome ideology” (1997:113).

22 At the website “Mormon Scholars Testify” there are numerous LDS scholars listed giving their personal testimonies to the faith, in hopes to “dispel that myth” that higher education erodes religious belief. http://mormonscholarstestify.org/. Accessed March 13, 2011. In Mormonism, higher levels of education correlate with higher rates of religiosity (Albrecht and Heaton 1984), which is the case among many of the participants in this study.
into apostasy for overturning the practice of plural marriage. For the FLDS, whose prophetic leadership maintains that this apostasy is a repudiation of God’s sacred revelation and a corrupt accommodation to the secular state, they now claim to carry on the prophetic tradition of Joseph Smith to the exclusion of the larger church. The Salt Lake City Mormons, according to their late prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley, do not recognize ‘fundamentalist’ Mormons – there is no such entity. In this example there are competing prophetic voices, each that claim ascendancy and legitimacy to the apostasy of the other; each considers their opposing prophets to be cases of false prophets, which both the Christian and Mormon scriptures warn against.

Although none of the schism groups within the Latter-day Saint Family come close in number to the over thirteen billion followers of the Salt Lake City LDS Church, clearly the phenomenon of personal revelation potentially leads to apostasy and division. Therefore, the LDS Church takes all necessary disciplinary action to enforce “diligence and obedience” within the global church community – to maintain the sacred boundaries of the covenant. For every active member, the “authentic [personal] testimony recognizes the church as the institutional guardian of religious doctrine” and by loyal obedience sustains the General Authorities reinforcing the hierarchy of the church (White 1995:85-86). To preserve the boundaries of the faith where obedience fails, the church’s disciplinary actions may include informal, probationary sanctions for lesser offenses by repentant members to excommunicating or disfellowshipping those whose sins require the most severe discipline. What is more remarkable is that of some thirteen million followers, several million of whom are active Mormons presumably receiving ongoing personal revelation on a daily basis, there are so very few schisms in
Mormonism. Duffy suggests that the possibility of potential sanctions control the “development of prophetic charisms” by enjoining Mormons not to speak of those personal revelations or temple experiences – that which is sacred in Mormonism (Duffy 2007b:10). To keep silent about such sacred matters is to conform to ideal orthodox Mormon norms; to be kept silent helps to discourage dissident voices.

In this study, rationality expands to include the embodied phenomenological experience of personal revelation, among other religious experiences, in everyday Mormon life. For Mormons, staying within the covenant community is dependent upon the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost; the apostasy of a member is grave. These revelations and other religious experiences, when they are communicated, are often articulated by metaphors, however literal or figurative in construction. As a dramatically new, or restored, order of revelation, Mormon revelation “presents Christianity with a radical challenge, one that may reinvigorate even as it threatens to unacceptably reshape the theology of revelation” (Givens 2002:219). Reshaping the theology of revelation in Mormonism challenges these critical categories in the study of religion by making divine revelation ordinary or natural, democratic, continuous, and rational rather than supernatural, elite, discontinuous, and non-rational. Rationality is expanded to include these subjective religious experiences in a way that ideally unifies and synthesizes universal, relative, embodied and phenomenological rationalities into an ordered and eternal ‘nomos.’ The LDS aspire to teach all people a universal set of principles or doctrines revealed by deity that ultimately transcend particular cultural contexts. However, they understand that these principles will be received in culturally specific time and place, transported by culturally circumscribed missionaries, and are
subject to some semiotic and linguistic interpretation and nuance as beheld by the receiver. Any such relativity will be ideally conformed to the Mormon “lifeworld” or *habitus* – this is the process of acculturation, or consolidation into the new religious identity.

For most converts, the defining testimony at the invitation of the missionaries is a synthesis of rational inquiry and study with prayerful religious experience yielding that visceral feeling or voice that attests to Mormon truth. For some Mormons the testimony is an event compressing heaven and earth, ancient times with end times, and comporting a personal history with the Joseph Smith story. It is a rational revelation, it is the opportunity for direct personal communication with God, and it is pregnant with meaning. For missionaries, the convert’s receipt of a testimony is validation of self-evident truth, and a reinforcement of their own testimonies.
CHAPTER 5
MORMONISM: AN AMERICAS CHURCH

In the autumn of 1830, within six months of the founding of the restored church of Jesus Christ, four missionaries were called by revelation to Joseph Smith, Jr. into the wilderness. Their mission was to go among the Native Americans also known to the Mormons as ‘Lamanites’ who were believed to be a remnant of ancient Israel in the Americas. This missionary endeavor among the “Indians” near Buffalo, New York extended fifteen hundred miles to “the borders by the Lamanites (D & C 28:9)” along the boundary that ran between Missouri and the western Indian territory of frontier America (Church History in the Fulness [sic] of Times 1993:79). In fulfillment of Book of Mormon prophecy, “At some period of time they [the Lamanites] will be brought to believe in his [God’s] word, and to know of the incorrectness of the traditions of their fathers; and many of them will be saved” (Alma 9:17)” (Church History:79).

As members of the newly restored church, Cowdery, Pratt, Whitmer, and Peterson understood the time as nigh to remind the American house of Israel of its covenant status with the millennial age imminent. From the title page of the Book of Mormon, their divine mandate read, in part: “Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites—Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile—Written by way of commandments, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation . . .” (Book of Mormon: Title Page).

The four proselytizers made a reciprocal “missionary covenant” to obey the commands of God. Through the direction of the Holy Ghost, they were to gather the
Lamanites for the purpose of redeeming Israel, building a temple in Zion, and praying
for protection for them and their posterities.

Manchester, Oct. 17, 1830. I, Oliver [Cowdery], being commanded of the
Lord God, to go forth unto the Lamanites, to proclaim glad tidings of great
joy unto them, by presenting unto them the fulness [sic] of the Gospel, of
the only begotten son of God; and also, to rear up a pillar as a witness
where the Temple of God shall be built, in the glorious New-Jerusalem;
and having certain brothers with me, who are called of God to assist me,
whose names are Parley [P. Pratt], Peter [Whitmer Jr.] and Ziba
[Peterson], do therefore most solemnly covenant before God, that I will
walk humbly before him, and do this business, and this glorious work
according as he shall direct me by the Holy Ghost; ever praying for mine
and their prosperity, and deliverance from bonds, and from
imprisonments, and whatsoever may befal [sic] us, with all patience and
faith.— Amen. (The Joseph Smith Papers:1).¹

In Mormon doctrine, the Lamanites are descended from the Hebrew lineage of
Joseph, son of Jacob, through his sons Manasseh and Ephraim (Mauss 2003:41-73).
By divine guidance these families were led out of Jerusalem near the Babylonian exile
c. 587 B.C.E. by the patriarch Lehi, of Manasseh’s lineage, crossing the Pacific and
settling somewhere along the Mesoamerican coast. The resurrected Jesus Christ
appeared among the Book of Mormon peoples conducting a mission in fulfillment of
Isaiah’s prophecy, according to accounts in 3 Nephi. But the Lamanites, through the
intervening centuries, forgot these covenant promises, and fell into apostasy due to the
“incorrectness” of their fathers. Conflict arose between two of Lehi’s sons; the followers
of Nephi were those who stayed true to the promises of the ancient covenant as the
Lamanites fell into apostasy, becoming a “dark” and “loathsome” people. Protecting
their ancient scriptures, the last Nephite warrior Moroni buried the golden plates of

¹ Manchester Township, New York was where the family of Joseph Smith lived, 1819-1829. Joseph
Smith’s 1820 “First Vision” in what was to become known as the “sacred grove” was on or near this farm.
Oliver Cowdery labored as the main scribe to Joseph Smith’s translation of much of the Book of Mormon,
was one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon’s physical evidence, and along with Joseph Smith
received the restored priesthood necessary to lead missionaries among the Lamanites.
Israelite history in the Americas for posterity, later to be revealed to God’s new prophet, Joseph Smith. The Nephites fell into sin, and ultimately succumbed to the Lamanites who prevailed, with progeny peopling the Americas.²

**Zion in the Americas**

The story of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints cannot be understood without the Western Hemispheric context. For the Mormons, this story is a providential one set necessarily in the Americas where Jesus Christ ministered among the ancient Israelites. The church was founded in the United States where freedom of religion provided the fertile social environment for the restoration of the ancient church of Jesus Christ. By 1830, Joseph Smith had become the founder and prophet of an indigenous North American new religious movement complete with its own canon and a missionary imperative to build up Zion in the Americas in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, with his millennial rule in Independence, Jackson County, Missouri. Therefore, the Americas, for the Mormons, are where their revealed narrative and destiny come to sacred fruition.

²“Official Lamanite discourse” (Duffy 2008) has changed throughout Mormon history based in part on geographical problems with Book of Mormon historicity. Early Mormons believed the peopling of the Americas to have occurred hemispherically, the Israelite descendants having spread throughout the two continents. But challenged first by Mormon scholar B. H. Roberts pointing to the problematic diversity of Native American languages (Givens 2002:89-154), again by archaeological anachronisms (Mauss 2003:114-157), and most recently by DNA studies (Murphy 2003), there has been a shift to a “limited” geography where there is a subtle official acknowledgement that other migrations to the Americas might have occurred accounting for some of its inhabitants. In limited geography, a small group of Book of Mormon people in Mesoamerica was ultimately absorbed into larger populations, losing its Semitic genetic markers (Duffy 2008:121). The limited geography provides a way to maintain Book of Mormon historical veracity while accommodating revisionist studies on genetics among indigenous Americans. See John Sorenson’s (1985) work on Book of Mormon geography and topography parallels in Mesoamerican Mayan geography, which is validated by BYU’s Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) (Mauss 2003:143). Lamanite discourse remains relevant among the participants in this study.
As the people of Ephraim, secured with priesthood keys for gathering Israel, the first missions were necessarily to the Lamanites – the house of Israel – right there on the American frontier. It was up to the followers of Joseph Smith to remind the Lamanites of their ancient chosen status and covenant obligations, taking with them the Book of Mormon pages as witness to their history, the restoration of their covenant status, and instrument of conversion thereto.³ After Mormon expulsions through Ohio, Missouri and Illinois, the location of Zion by the end of Smith’s life had changed to include all of North and South America, with Nauvoo, Illinois as its “geographic center” (Taysom 2011:69).

By Smith’s death in 1844, the mission project had developed to proclaim the “cause of Zion” and its gathering, with a dispensational urgency, and a systemization of mission work under priesthood authority which continues to this day (Golding 2010:75-76). Finally expelled from Illinois, the exodus required another Moses in the figure of Brigham Young relocating the Mormons in the Great Salt Lake Basin where they encountered yet additional Lamanites: new North American tribes and mestizos (Knowlton 2011, Tamez 2011). Parley Pratt undertook an unsuccessful mission to Chile in 1851, where language and the state made missionary work too difficult. Under exile and repeated persecution in the Salt Lake Basin, the purpose of mission from Mexico in 1875 to Canada was to colonize a new location should another exodus become necessary.

The Intermountain west, or “Mormon culture region” (O’Dea 1957; Meinig, 1965; Yorgason 2003) became the separatist home to significant diversity in the early Utah

³ For a discussion on the many roles among both followers and detractors of the Book of Mormon, including its utility in Lamanite discourse, see Terryl L. Givens (2002).
church; Native Americans, Polynesians, and Hispanics converted to join various northern Europeans including British, Welsh, Danes, Germans, Swiss, Norwegians, and others (Jensen 1987, Embry 1997). Some 30,000 European and Eastern U. S. immigrants were 'gathered in Zion' through loans made by the church's Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company, 1849 to 1887 (Boone 1992). The end of plural marriage and the collectivist economic order brought Utah statehood, the further marginalization of the Native Americans, and the assimilation of Mormons into the broader American culture. By the end of the century, the mission to the North American Indians, or "old Lamanites" had waxed and waned with minimal success. The unifying millennial vision of Smith and his early followers to gather the descendants of ancient Israel into Zion was largely turned toward the "new Lamanites" of Latin America (Mauss, 2003:74-157).

Latin America, for the Mormons, became an abundant foreign mission field of possibility for building the kingdom of God in the Americas. By the early 1900s the physical gathering of Israel to the United States had been replaced by building Zion around the world (Shipps 2000d:260-261). Latin America was opened for proselytizing in 1925 in Argentina (Williams and Williams 1987). Brazil was split out of the South American Mission by 1935 when its first mission was opened in São Paulo. But it was the post-World War II era in the Protestant expansion and diversification of Latin American religion that Mormonism also took off. Some of the missionaries in this study were active in the South American Missions in Argentina and Uruguay.

4 In early Mormonism, the impetus to gather saints in Zion led to subsidized emigration of European converts as inaugurated in 1849 through the Perpetual Emigration Fund, which resettled over 30,000 European immigrant converts to Utah by 1887. Realizing that it was no longer pragmatic to resettle foreign converts, the administration of President Spencer W. Kimball ended the PEF, encouraging foreign Latter-day Saints to ‘build Zion where you are.’ And ultimately in the Second Coming, Zion will be in the central place revealed to Joseph Smith – Independence, Missouri.
In the U. S. Utah attracted Mexican agricultural workers to the sugar beet fields, leading to the creation of the Local Mexican Mission in 1921 (Iber 2000:27). The Spanish American Mission was opened in Los Angeles 1936 and expanded by 1958 into the West Spanish American Mission to serve 5 million Spanish Americans in California, Arizona, and Nevada (Embry 1997:21). By the 1960s and in part as a result of the 1964 World’s Fair in New York City, the church extended its Hispanic outreach to include East coast states, among them Florida (Embry 1997:23). The history of LDS expansion in Florida is discussed in Chapter 6.

The priesthood revelation of 1978 was fortuitously timed to the opening of the São Paulo temple (Grover 1990), and its consequences rippled throughout the Americas, and the Caribbean Islands of the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission. Prior, any men of African lineage were prohibited from holding the LDS priesthood. Missionary expansion in the Americas was of utmost concern to President Kimball, who was thought of as the “Lamanite apostle” and it was under his leadership that the priesthood ban revelation arrived (Embry 1994:28). The antebellum LDS Church was not substantially different in its tragic understanding of race than was America. However, there were at least two African Americans who held the priesthood under Joseph Smith (Embry 1994:22), a practice reported to have changed under Brigham Young (Bringhurst and Smith 2006:4) who condoned slavery in Utah (Jacobson 2004:12-13). Although the racial lineages of Abraham’s children have changed conceptually over the course of Mormon history in the Americas (Mauss 2003), ⁵ Mormons still understand

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⁵ Lamanite identity has also been variously reckoned by those who are called Lamanites (Duffy 2008). Among the nuanced identities, some identify as birthright Lamanites, which superior claim has led to leadership problems for the church; some identify as national members of the church; some Latin Americans of European descent no longer think of themselves as gentile members; and all should
themselves as chosen to restore the one true Christian church, recapitulating all divine covenants, gathering the scattered of Israel along with the gentiles from around the world into the new and everlasting covenant. This restoration is the task of Mormon mission.

**Cultural Encounters**

With an approximate eighty-five percent of its membership in the Americas most of who reside outside the United States and speak Spanish, where nearly eighty percent of temples are located in the Americas,\(^6\) Joseph Smith’s vision has its largest presence in the Western Hemisphere. As the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has internationalized it has encountered peoples of all global ethnicities. In this chapter, conversions and motivations explain, in part, the growth of the church in the Americas. Although Mormons claim their church is a “faith for all cultures” (Tullis 1978), there are nevertheless significant cultural implications involved in spreading an American faith all over the world. These implications include problems related to conversion such as language, acculturation and retention, and building a local leadership. Together these challenges have implications for the worldwide church and how it counts official membership. As one of the plausibility structures in restoring the sacred covenant, the role of the missionary cannot be overstated. Without the perpetual influx of missionaries, the LDS Church is unlikely to grow internationally. This church supply of missionaries corresponds with an apparent demand, which is to say

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the “alignment is synchronous” and necessary for the growth of any missionary church (Lawson and Cragun 2012:221).

Conversions and Motivations

These questions: “Why is the LDS Church growing among the people of Latin America – why would Latin Americans convert to Mormonism – what are the motivations?” remain a salient topic in Mormon Studies. The appeals for the earliest converts to Mormonism in nineteenth century America and Europe are equally applicable to recent converts in the Americas and worth quoting at length:

If Mormonism as it was preached to the confused and disinherited of America and Europe seemed to hold out hope for a new tomorrow, the chance of putting down stakes in Zion, working out one’s salvation, and an imminent coming of Christ; if it brought the cheerless and lonely into groups where they were called brother and sister and made to feel part of a family; if it provided a sense of direction and possibilities of progress to many who had fallen into despair – it should not be surprising that it attracted followers. . . . In Mormonism, then, the converts found security. And they found answers. . . . The unique feature of Mormonism’s appeal was its combination of theological intelligibility and spiritual reassurance with a specific program offering material and emotional satisfaction in the present. When many motives coincide, the results are powerful (Bitton and Arrington 1992:42-43).

In other words, converts then found what contemporary converts find (Lasater 2003); a sacred canopy or covenant of protection with family lineages of belief that together provide meaning, and answers in an otherwise precarious existence.

These tangible appeals and anomic social environments notwithstanding, people joined the church, then as now, simply because they came to believe that the church was “true” (Arrington and Davis 1992:23). Likewise in Latin America, “social and economic changes, which lessen traditional religious and social controls, create a large pool of potential members. At this point, the Spirit touches those potential members so that they seek out or accept the message [of truth] of the missionaries” (Grover
In conversion then, there are measurable empirical indicators of change and there are also those inexplicable feelings or urgings that confirm “truth.” No other appeals or motives for becoming a Mormon are necessary, although the receipt of a personal testimony is frequently left out of the academic literature on conversion. The act of conversion may be as seemingly simple as gaining a personal testimony, but it is rare. Conversion, often predisposed as a result of crisis, is typically both the product and the producer of a long process of personal transformation (Gooren 2007a; Lasater 2003).

Steigenga and Cleary (2007) contextualize the study of conversion among people from the Latin American region across religions and cultures. Although the Pauline trauma is the experience for some converts, religious change is more likely within a larger “continuum of conversion” taking place across time though not necessarily in a linear fashion, and interacting with social networks, cultural factors, and institutional religious contexts (7). Not all converts are stricken by a singular moment of confirming “truth.”

In the volume, Henri Gooren’s work among Pentecostals, Catholics, and Mormons in Central America has identified “conversion careers” as a staged process of life changes that occur over time, including pre-affiliation, affiliation, conversion, confession, and disaffiliation (2007:52-71). Gooren argues for a “life-cycle approach” which accounts for changes through a member’s lifetime rather than focusing on one stage, such as adolescence (54). Gooren’s informants reported a “contingency social factor” such as a crisis turning-point, a meeting with missionaries either by chance or by a friend after which, if they receive sufficient support from members the retention rate is
high. If not, and if the church demands seem too great, the disaffiliation rate goes up (62). This conversion career approach captures the complexity and vacillations of religious change, its motivations, and the transformation throughout the life span.

Conversions have profound consequences for family life. In Latin American and Caribbean families, there is a strong sense of familial solidarity, which is often identified with Catholicism however nominal. Mormon missionaries refer to this affiliation as ‘cultural Catholic’ or ‘traditional Catholic’ or non-practicing Catholic. But despite the fact that religious affiliations are loose, which are conducive to religious switching, familial affiliations are not. The single most salient factor in conversions to the LDS Church was that of the trauma over family fractures, including religious incongruity (Lasater 2003). To be adopted into a new Mormon lineage may appear appealing, but it may produce another family rupture. On the other hand, the conversion may be so successful in life transformation, progress, and upward mobility, that the convert becomes a model for his family who also join. As will be seen in later in this study, Mormon missionaries emphasize teaching and converting entire families as the most profitable recruitment method. If the entire family is adopted into Mormonism, there is a higher likelihood of retention (Jarvis 2000). Further, if the entire family converts, the disaggregation of family, religion, and culture is largely ameliorated.

**Acculturation and Retention**

Latter-day Saints encourage new converts to acculturate to Mormon religious norms as readily as possible, while realizing that conversely, host country cultural norms and traditions are important yet transient. Noel B. Reynolds writes of human culture vis-à-vis the culture of the gospel, which is “essentially subversive of the world view perpetuated by the cultures of man” (1978:9). Religious traditions are often
culturally ingrained to the point that culture and religion are indistinguishable, as in the case of Latin American cultural Catholicism. While the majority of Latin Americans claim to be Catholic, many are nominally so, and often much more culturally Catholic than religiously so. There is historically a very low priest to parishioner ration, so much so that the general perception among various Christian mission advocates of Latin American Catholics is that they have long been poorly evangelized. As such, they are vulnerable to conversion. Nevertheless, traditions die hard, if at all, when confronted with a new religious culture, such as Mormonism. A few cases are illustrative of these cultural encounters.

**Mexico**

During their missionary work in Mexico in the late 1960s, Gary Shepherd and Gordon Shepherd (1998) wrote of their missionary experience in confronting icons of the Virgin Mary,

Household displays of sacred objects such as crucifixes and statuary are, of course, commonplace in Catholic cultures. But in Mexico, devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe is particularly intense, and her standardized image is ubiquitous throughout the country, even in otherwise highly secularized settings. Outside of their own temples Mormons share a traditional Protestant aversion to concrete forms of symbolism and iconography. Resolute removal of pictures and statues of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the saints from their customary places in investigators’ homes was, to us as Mormon missionaries, the most visible expression of conversion sincerity and commitment to the new religious perspective we had taught. Our naiveté concerning the depth of many Mexicans’ cultural attachment to these symbols generated much mutual bemusement and frustration, as our diary accounts amply reveal (115-116, n. 16).

In this case, acculturation into Mormonism raises questions of syncretism and authentic conversion. Is it possible for a new Mexican Mormon convert from Catholicism to retain a statue of the Virgin Mary or is that an illegitimate form of syncretism? According to some participants in my research, the convert may keep the
Virgin – if the statue is only used as art and not as an icon of veneration, which action would be syncretistic. Others are not so sure. As one LDS informant explained to me, these Catholic residuals, such as a new convert wearing a crucifix, can be patiently ‘taught away.’ As the new member acculturates into the community of Latter-day Saints, they gradually that keeping a statute of the Virgin Mary and wearing a crucifix would be out of the norm for Mormons, and they comport their behavior accordingly. These changes are generally only a matter of time, and Mormons need only be patient with new members whose faith will be gradually consolidated.

**Haiti**

The case of Haitian Mormons is instructive with regard to identity formation. In Haiti, where religions are “rarely understood to be autonomous from one another” there is no incongruence between participating in a “Voudou ceremony on Saturday evening and a Catholic mass or Protestant sacrament on Sunday morning” (Basquiat 2004:1). When ill, Haitians, including Haitian Mormons, often turn to the “houngan” or Voudou priest (25), “the first doctors” (26) for healing. For Basquiat, the patchwork of Haitian traditions, such as Voudou combined with Mormonism is a bricolage, rather than syncretism. Bricolage is thought to be less embedded than syncretism; a patchwork is easier to assemble and disassemble than to un-synthesize a synthesis or syncretism. While a settling of these definitions is beyond the scope of this work, it is sufficient to say for now that whether syncretism or bricolage, religio-cultural blendings in any combinations jeopardize religious orthodoxy and are discouraged by the LDS.

**Guatemala**

In Guatemala, LDS Lamanite descent and identity are asserted as having a status superior to that of Anglo Mormonism (Murphy 1999). “Through the evidences of
rapid growth in Latin America, scriptural promises, and a primordial ethnic attachment to Israel and ancient America, Guatemalan Mormons, in a manner reminiscent of distinction claimed by the Third Convention and George P. Lee, translate their marginal position in the church to one of primary significance by invoking the past and the future” (Murphy 1996:181-182). Not only do Mayan Guatemalans negotiate identity, but they also negotiate sacred texts and architectural ruins with Mormonism by the reading of the *Popol Vuh* into the Book of Mormon (182). Additionally, by negotiating the Word of Wisdom into two parallel dietary codes where hot and cold are differently interpreted – Mormon and Guatemalan – “neither indigenization nor imitation can be considered accomplished in Guatemalan Mormonism” (1997:305). In an American religion that is strict in conformity, there are nevertheless underlying currents of personal agency.

Successful acculturating to strict religions adds to group cohesion, eliminates free-riders, increases the currency of being a member, and provides the external stimuli to discipline oneself and one’s family, ward and stake; only the strong need apply (Iannaconne 1997b). However, as Gooren’s work shows among Pentecostals, “disaffiliation was caused exactly by the high demands – in discipline, morality, time, and money – of the church in question” (2007:68). Likewise, for Mormons, where high demands might have operated as an appeal, those same demands may make new members susceptible to high rates of inactivity or disaffiliation.

In addition to disaffiliation due to Mormonism’s high demands, another reason is an absence of fellowshipping new members into the congregation. Some of Gooren’s Guatemalan participants reported inactivity because the members had not shown an

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7 The Mexican Third Convention is discussed later in this chapter under leadership.
interest in them as they were backsliding into old habits (2007:64). Upon subsequent return to the church, this time they were given callings which “reinforce and sustain their commitment” (65). However, giving a calling too soon can also overwhelm a new member, causing them to stay away, as one Gooren informant reported (65). The correct balance for new members is a simple formula mentioned by several participants, which they attribute to their late president, Gordon B. Hinckley, ‘every new member needs three things: a friend, a calling, and nourished by the good word of God.’

Those three things sound simple enough, but Mormonism is a total transformation for many new members – into a new way of life and worldview, or identity, including a complete reprioritization of life’s concerns toward the church and the family. David Stewart describes those ideal “Habits of Faith” which if enacted consistently by the new member will ensure his or her retention: read from the Book of Mormon for thirty minutes per day; attend all church meetings; observe the Sabbath; hold personal and family prayer daily; obey the Word of Wisdom completely; “obey the Law of Chastity in word, thought, and deed;” participate in an adequate baptismal interview after first having been nurtured by the missionaries and members; include active members in proselyting discussions with prospective converts; assign a calling within at least one week of baptism; assign home teachers prior to baptism; begin personal family history research immediately upon baptism; and “prepare to participate in temple proxy baptisms within six weeks of baptism” (2007: 281-282). Other demands include the ten percent tithe on income. Acculturation could be considered on a continuum. If new members are acculturated to Stewart’s “habits of faith” they are retained, and serve callings, which help prepare them for local leadership and temple-
worthiness. If, on the other hand, new members are not sufficiently acculturated to Mormonism, they are likely to fall away.

While the church and its mission ideally seek to transcend culture and yield temple-worthy Mormons of all its new converts creating new stakes in Zion in new host cultures, it is clear that Latter-day Saints understand that their gospel culture trumps any human culture. New members are initially willing to embrace Mormonism – or become acculturated – in the attempt to make the religion their own; for those who persevere and yield their own cultural traditions to those of the gospel when required, the result is a devout Mormon. But it also the case that many converts ultimately cannot adhere to the new covenant mandates. The Mormon aversion to syncretism often requires jettisoning deeply embedded religious traditions, such as venerating the Virgin Mary, or incompatible socio-cultural features, such as the temptations of carnivals. Strict standards including the law of chastity and most notoriously, the Word of Wisdom require significant behavior modification often in the face of untreated addiction. Requirements of tithing both money and time can burden a family’s resources. While any or all of these factors may mitigate against joining and or retention, all are necessary for becoming an active Mormon who can attend the temple and hold leadership positions.

Mauss (1994) writes that where other missionizing faiths have encountered cross-cultural difficulty, like Mormonism has, there have been three historical responses. First, as new religious movements encountered cultural difficulty they were relegated to small, fringe groups. Second, such as mainline Protestants in the foreign mission field, they emphasized humanitarian work “rather than religious proselytizing
per se.” And third, such as Catholicism in Latin America, the religions accepted “large increments of local syncretism.” While none of these are amenable to the ideals of Mormonism, there might be a “fourth way (or perhaps it’s a variant of the third)” that Mauss calls the “minimizing of Mormonism” to make it “maximally adaptable” to other cultural contexts (1994:209). Later in this study, the participants will discuss what they think the core non-negotiable features of Mormonism must be, irrespective of culture.

**Leadership**

Church leadership requires sufficient acculturation and retention if it is to become a local leadership, rather than North American. If new converts cannot adhere to the Word of Wisdom, for example, then they are not available to step into leadership positions. In the absence of sufficient numbers of local priesthood holders, missions are slow to transition into branches, wards and stakes. It is the goal of the church to replace the presence of twenty-one-year-old North American missionaries running the nascent branches as soon as possible with local men. Assuming that sufficient numbers of priesthood holders are retained to fill local levels of leadership, there remain difficulties in negotiating the American administrative style:

The atmosphere of bureaucratic rationalism that pervades most programmed instruction or administrative materials is most congenial to the educated, white-collar males of Europe and the Americas. But it is hardly intelligible to those who lack this cultural equipment and who, like blue-collar workers and intuitive Indians, usually perceive leadership and its functions in highly personal terms (Reynolds 1978:16).

Training local leaders is one of the most important concerns of the growing international church, which does not want to be perceived as being culturally imperialist by running all the programs.
In the case of Mexico, the problem of acculturation, in this case identity, took the opposite turn into a full crisis of leadership. The church had colonized northern Mexico in 1875 as a possible place of exile should the Latter-day Saints need to flee Utah under persecution by the federal government for plural marriage. Between 1875 and the turn of the century, Utah colonists provided much of the Mexican leadership. By the mid-1930s Mexican Latter-day Saints had been well acculturated for decades into local leadership roles, and had fully embraced their Lamanite descent as written in the Book of Mormon. Due to their unhappiness with the Anglo mission president, and in relative isolation from the authorities in Salt Lake City who were arguably preoccupied with the Depression, they struggled to name a Mexican mission president of their own, in lieu of an Anglo appointed by the church (Tullis 1997:117-118). The church would not have it, and although the Mexicans felt chastised, they acquiesced to an Anglo American mission president.

But the problems of Mormon identity as they understood the Book of Mormon were not to go away; who are the Lamanites, and who are the Gentiles? (Tullis 1997:110). The tensions between Salt Lake City and the Mexican Mission festered until those who participated in the “Third Convention” broke away from the church, with about 800 Mexican Saints (142), after which they were excommunicated in 1937. They were later reconciled under President George Albert Smith in 1946 in large part due to the efforts of David O. McKay (153).

This crisis of local leadership was none other than a crisis of acculturation, and is a demonstrative case of both – the Mexican Latter-day Saints assumed their birthright

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8 For the connections between the Mexican Mormons and Utah, see Iber (2000).
as descendants of the Lamanites and after years of leadership preparedness, and asserted their authority as cultural identity in opposition to the central Anglo authority in Salt Lake City. “The Mexican Saints sought a mission president of their own nationality not only out of practical necessity, but because they thought it would foster self-respect rather than continued dependence” (Tullis 1997:117). In the Mexican case, the Latter-day Saints were sufficiently acculturated into Mormon Lamanite identity and prepared for leadership, after which they were denied local authority, causing a defection and excommunication from the church, which took more than a decade to reconcile.⁹

As the church grows internationally, the ethnic make-up of the Latter-day Saints changes. In assessing the status of majority/minorities in the church using four ethnic groupings – Latin, black, Asian/Pacific, and European non-Latin (white) – Devyn Smith found that as of 2002, the church membership was approximately thirty-six percent Latin; three percent black; ten percent Asian/Pacific, and fifty percent white (2005).¹⁰ Yet the ethnic composition of the 2002 General Authorities¹¹ was all white except eight total ethnic leaders in the First and Second Quorums of the Seventy (six Latinos and one Asian in the First, and one Latino in the Second, respectively). These eight ethnic members in the General Authorities were actually down from 1992 when there fourteen ethnic members, one of whom was black. Smith attributes the over proportionate white composition in the church’s hierarchy as contributing “to the fact that there has been no

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⁹ The Mexican Third Convention, it must be remembered, occurred in the 1930s, before the sea change in Latin American religion, which since has yielded millions of Latin American converts to the church.

¹⁰ The church no longer tracks race or ethnicity. As of January 1, 2011 of 14,131,467 members, there are 6,327,137 in North America and 5,503,135 in Latin America and the Caribbean including Mexico (Church Almanac 2012:4).

¹¹ The General Authorities of the church include, working from the top down, the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Presiding Bishopric, Presidency of the 70, First Quorum of 70, Second Quorum of 70.
appreciable increase in convert baptism around the world for the past dozen years” (2005:71). Growth in the church has been at a fairly constant rate of approximately 300,000 new members 1992 to 2002 (280,000 converts and 80,000 children of record; see Appendix Table 1, letter B) (2005:71).

**Growth in the Church**

**Counting Mormons**

Growth in the international church has been measured mainly by utilizing official LDS membership statistics; the most recent count puts worldwide membership at 14,131,467 (*Church Almanac* 2012:4). The work of Rodney Stark (1984; 1994; 1996) on LDS expansion using church data has done much to promote the perception of the LDS Church as a rapidly growing world religion. His projections estimate that by 2080 Mormonism will have grown by a low estimate of thirty percent per decade to approximately sixty-three million members, or to a high estimate of 265 million (at fifty percent per decade) (Stark 1984:22).

Within the Americas, most of the expansion of the church has been in the Latin American region. While the greatest concentration of membership is still in North America, the Western Hemisphere accounts for an approximate eighty-five percent of all LDS members worldwide (*Church Almanac* 2012).

Several scholars have called into question these assessments of LDS growth due to a discrepancy between the official membership and national census statistics from countries in which citizens self-identify religious affiliation. While the official church data make no assessment of activity rates as measured within membership statistics,

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12 The membership recorded in the 2012 *Church Almanac* is as of January 1, 2011. Official membership is updated and announced annually during the April General Conference.
sacrament service attendance rates differ throughout the world: In the US, Canada and the South Pacific attendance is between forty and fifty percent; Europe and Africa about thirty-five percent; and Asia and Latin America is at twenty-five percent (Heaton 1992:1527). More recently, David Stewart calculates Heaton’s percentages at an average worldwide activity rate of thirty-five percent or four million who attend weekly (2007:36). Official counts of members do not consider levels of activity, or retentions after baptism.

Arguing that it is premature to call the LDS Church a “world religion,” Phillips states rather that “Mormonism is best described as a North American church with contingents in other continents . . .” (2006:52-53). Phillips demonstrates church statistics and census figures for six countries: Australia, Austria, Canada, Chile, Mexico and New Zealand. Considering the three countries in the Americas, in Canada’s 2001 census Mormons were about fifty-eight percent of official figures; in Chile the census Mormons were just over twenty-seven percent of church statistics; and in Mexico, Mormons were slightly over twenty-three percent of the official numbers (2006:55).

David Knowlton compares census data with official church membership in Chile and Mexico, finding the census Latter-day Saints at twenty-five percent or less than the church claims (2005:54). Studying Mormonism in Bolivia, Knowlton approximates Bolivian membership to be between twenty and twenty-five percent of official counts. As of year-end 2003 there were officially 137,817 members with between 28,000 and

13 Approximations of one-third participation are very close to what two FFLM active missionaries and a ward bishop call the “rule of thirds” – in other words, one-third are active and attending, one-third are inactive, and one-third are fallen away or disaffiliated. LDS leaders are amused that social science has discovered that there are many members not attending; this research comes as no surprise to them, generally.
Based on fieldwork in Central America Gooren also finds official church records at variance with his research in Guatemala (2000) and Nicaragua (2007).

While counting adherents is clearly problematic, it is nevertheless useful to look at congregational expansion as some measure of tangible growth. If new members fail to consolidate within the faith and are not retained, it is plausible that there would not be growth in stakes. The case of Santo Domingo is illustrative. In the Dominican Republic, as of year-end 2003, the church reported 88,123 members in twelve stakes, seventy-eight wards, and 105 branches (Church Almanac 2005:320). By year end 2008, the count was 110,036 in nineteen stakes, 117 wards, and eighty branches (Church Almanac 2010:472). In 2003 there were fifteen family history centers; by 2008 there were nineteen history centers. There are three missions; two in Santo Domingo and one in Santiago. One Dominican participant in this study was a pioneer in the Dominican church, and is pleased with its progress, mentioning new units as evidence of expansion and retention.

Retentions are a worry for the church and its leaders, which expends millions of dollars annually on its mission enterprise, as do its members whose families support the active missionaries. New members not retained are members unavailable for local leadership development. The missionaries in the latter part of this research are circumspect about retentions; concerned, but they also acknowledge individual agency. Certainly, everyone has a role to play; members need to provide good referrals,

14 Official records number Bolivian Mormons at 172,640 as of January 1, 2011 (Church Almanac 2012:429). If 25 percent are attending, that is approximately 43,000.

15 Management Information Center, Member and Statistical Records Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, by email July 31, 2008. Salt Lake City, Utah.
missionaries need to better prepare the investigators for the acculturation process into Mormonism and what will be expected, and members and leaders in local branches and wards need to fellowship new members, calling them to assignments, providing friendship, and spiritual guidance. Finally, new members need to persevere, keeping their covenants. Meanwhile, the missionaries will carry on, at a relatively steady corps of about 50,000 in service annually.

Birth Rates

Other than celibate groups such as the Shakers, religions grow by natural increase, or the birth rate, plus conversions of new members. In its annual accounting of worldwide church growth, the LDS headquarters reports two counts: “increase in children of record” and “converts.” ‘Children of record’ is the closest indicator to birthrate in the public LDS records. Stewart (2007) writes of the LDS decline in natural growth around the world due to three factors: low activity of members will correlate with lower increases in children of record, “suggesting that a large majority of inactive members rear their children outside of the Church” (27). Second, “many active international members marry outside the Church, while many others remain unmarried” suggesting that child rearing is happening outside the church. And third, among the core North American LDS membership, birthrates have declined down to three children in the active U. S. Mormon family (28). Worldwide, these factors have led to a steady decline over the past twenty-five years, despite “increasing LDS membership in high birthrate regions of the world, particularly Latin America” (25).

A cross-national comparison of Mormon infertility shows that for the US, Britain, and Japan the LDS fertility rate is above the national average, while for Mexico the LDS birthrate is lower than Mexico’s at large (Heaton 1989). Heaton says this may be
explained in part by the recency of data and overrepresentation in urban residents, but attributes the greater explanation to “joining an economically successful US-based religion may be associated with upward mobility, or at least greater aspirations in Mexico. Thus, joining the Mormon Church and reducing family size may be related” (1989:404).

Popular images of Latter-day Saints include large families, and according to Heaton, they have “persistently been larger than the U. S. national average . . . although since 1980 both Utah and total LDS birthrates have declined precipitously, though still remaining above total US levels” (1992:1522). Declining birthrates, divorce and cohabitation, and pressures for same-sex marriage together comprises what the General Authorities consider is the “traditional family” under siege (Bushman 2006:41), prompting an official declaration on the family. In 1995 the church issued its near-doctrinal position on the sanctity of the traditional nuclear family within marriage between one man and one woman, assuming “traditional” gender roles, and child-bearing in The Family: A Proclamation to the World. Mormons have more than a divine mandate to reproduce. Not only must they multiply, but in so doing they bring down ‘spirit children’ to provide the opportunity for all of God’s children to live an embodied life on Earth; this is a great act of generosity on the part of Mormon couples. Theologically speaking, the family into which children are born is the most important social unit in Mormon understanding.

A shift toward smaller families has implications for missionary work as well, in a church that is dependent upon its young adults to do its core proselytizing around the world. Over the past thirty years, only about one-third of Mormon men serve
proselytizing missions. With reduced family sizes, the overall pool of potential missionaries shrinks.

The LDS Missionary Corps

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is arguably most recognizable by virtue of its approximate 52,000 young full-time active missionary corps who recruit an average approximate 245,000 new members annually (Appendix Table 1, letter B). In missionary religions, Mormons have one of the most impressive numerical corps.¹⁶ Like many other Christians, the Mormons take seriously the Great Commission commandment. Add to that the revelations to Joseph Smith that reiterate the necessity of mission work to restore Christianity from apostasy and the results are a profound commitment to missionary work, both at institutional and individual levels.

The World Christian Encyclopedia lists an approximate 118,600 American Christian missionaries sent abroad, mid-year 2000, a total which includes LDS missionaries (Barrett, Kurian, Johnson 2001:843).¹⁷ The LDS Church reports having

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¹⁷ That the WCE includes the LDS in total Christians was confirmed by Todd M. Johnson, Ph.D., Director of the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Center for the Study of Global Christianity, the heir to the work of Dr. David B. Barrett; email in possession of author, dated July 13, 2012.
fielded a total missionary force year end 2000 (domestic and foreign) of 60,784 yielding 273,973 new convert baptisms (Watson 2000). Despite the fact that a sizeable number of LDS missionaries are in service in the United States, it can still be surmised that the LDS contribute a disproportionate share of those 118,600 missionaries sent abroad considering the fact that the church is now in 185 countries. Another factor in counting missionaries in the LDS Church are those foreign-born missionaries serving in the United States, who comprised twenty-four percent of the total corps in 1999 (Ludlow 2000:218). Other problems in comparing missionary statistics include the length of service. The LDS labor for eighteen months (women beginning as early as age twenty-one up to age forty) to two years (men beginning at nineteen up to twenty-five)\(^{18}\) while other denominations’ terms are less standardized. There are full-time and part-time, long term and short term missionaries, and professional ordained and lay, or any combinations thereof, depending on the sect, denomination, society or order. Some Catholic missionary orders are ordained for life while many lay Protestants serve very short durations of a few days or months. A significant outlier in counting missionaries is the Jehovah’s Witnesses—every active member who goes door-to-door regularly is called a “publisher” meaning millions of lay missionaries, defined very differently. This small sampling of global missionary statistics does not include mission societies, humanitarian or disaster relief, or NGOs, nor does it compare outcomes.

Missionary efficacy is ultimately a function of numbers of converts since retention falls largely to the local leadership and members. In official church records, in 2001, the

\(^{18}\) On October 6, 2012, the age of eligibility for women was lowered to nineteen; male age of eligibility was lowered to eighteen.
church had 60,850 missionaries who accounted for 292,612 baptisms or 4.81 per missionary. As of 2003, there were 4.32 baptisms per missionary but by 2010 there were 280,106 converts by 51,736 missionaries for a high of 5.41 over the ten year period (Table B-1). Shepherd and Shepherd (1996) demonstrate convert to missionary ratios back to 1940, tracking through 1994 when the highest ratio of converts to missionaries was 4.15. Their studies, followed by Hepworth (1999) show that the larger the numbers of missionaries the larger the number of convert baptisms. Since the “raising of the bar” however, the numbers of converts has increased while the numbers of missionaries has declined. While this trend is over a short period of time during the past decade, it does suggest that a greater number of converts may not depend entirely on a greater number of missionaries.

Overall, a prominent Mormon missiologist thinks Mormon mission “works well because the LDS believe the church organization is the kingdom of God. It is one church everywhere. Problems of “mission church versus local church” are virtually nonexistent. There is a careful order and chain of priesthood authority from the president of the church to the most recently ordained branch president in the distant parts of India or Peru” (Britsch 1979:24). He suggests that Mormons in mission generally are little concerned about the implications of mission. “Latter-day Saints generally have little use for what might be called mission theory. They pursue the work of preaching the gospel in a matter-of-fact manner, worrying little about cultural adaptation and other related problems” (24).

The three-fold mission imperative – proclaim the gospel, perfect the Saints, and redeem the dead – finds global expression in host countries as missionaries take the
gospel abroad, and in so doing help expand the church membership inviting all to come into the covenant. The missionaries strive for perfection, and intend to return with honor. The new community of Latter-day Saints in the host country acculturates, and works toward perfection and progress, maturing into leadership roles. Once the local community is of sufficient size and strength, a regional temple is built through which the new saints redeem their dead. This process of an area’s maturation is the case study contained later in this study.
“Building the Kingdom one covenant at a time” is “our purpose in mortality” instructs Apostle Holland in a 1997 missionary satellite broadcast around the world.¹ The kingdom of God in the Mormon vision is the original covenant revealed first to Adam and then to every successive dispensation, including Abraham, as well as the first apostles of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came in fulfillment of God’s covenant – through faith in Jesus Christ the kingdom of God is realized in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this last dispensation. This final restored covenant is what Mormons call the new and everlasting covenant as revealed to Joseph Smith, which provides the Mormon sacred canopy, an amalgam of all ancient Hebraic and Christian covenants fulfilled. Wherever the restored covenant is, so too is the church, and so too is the kingdom of God. Joseph Smith’s story would ultimately become doctrine for millions of Mormons, beginning with the first missionaries in nineteenth century America. To this day, the restoration of the new and everlasting covenant revealed provides the structure for the enactment of covenants made in every day Mormon life. “Covenants can and should be stimulating, motivational, and indeed a most stabilizing influence among men” (Tripp 1973:1).

To build that kingdom and insure protection and belonging within the covenant boundaries, Mormons must engage obediently in the imperatives of the three-fold mission of the church (Hinckley 1983) as it structures and mobilizes its expanding

¹ Elder Holland first gave this address in 1997 during a missionary satellite broadcast. It was reprinted in the magazine Liahona, January 2012.
membership around the world.\textsuperscript{2} The three-fold mission of the church provides the three plausibility structures that are unique for them: proclaim the gospel (mission), perfect the saints (stakes), and redeem the dead (temples). Mormons, like other Christians, are under the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to proclaim the gospel by making disciples in all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). But unlike other Christians, Latter-day Saints make a specific covenant to do so and build their church and families around mission, the oldest plausibility structure. Elder Bruce McConkie said,

> When we come into the Church, we covenant in the waters of baptism that we will do missionary work. . . . This matter of carrying the gospel message to the world is not something that we can choose to do or not, if and when we may find it convenient. We are under covenant to do it at all times . . . and in all places . . . even until death” (Tripp 1973:18).

The call to serve a mission comes only to those who uphold all covenant promises and who submit to making disciples in all lands; this merging of the Hebrew covenant through Christian discipleship is uniquely enacted in Mormonism. The second plausibility structure is perfecting the saints and their families in stakes in Zion (Isaiah 54:2). These regional stakes have within their sphere all the local congregations where people work out their salvation in their families, or as President Hinckley stated, "The building of the Saints encouraging them in all of their activities" and third, "the great work of salvation for the dead" (Hinckley 1983). Redeeming the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29), or what Mormons call ‘temple work’ is the third plausibility structure where all family members dead and alive are united across the cosmos. This three-fold mission is considered visionary in the church; to ‘catch the vision’ is to internalize missionary

\textsuperscript{2} Second Counselor in the First Presidency, Gordon B. Hinckley delivered the address defining the three-fold mission at the 1983 General Conference in the absence of infirm President and Prophet Spencer W. Kimball. Gordon B. Hinckley, called as Prophet and President as of March 15, 1995 until his death January 27, 2008, just as this fieldwork was in full operation.
work, strive for perfection, and participate in the temple enduring to the end. Its entire purpose is to ‘invite all to come unto Christ’\(^3\) in fulfillment of the covenant.

Every three-fold mission activity involves the idea of covenant in Mormonism, contributing to significant overlap in the three plausibility structures. As a chosen people, the Mormons are called or ‘chosen’ to belong in the new and everlasting covenant relationship as invited by the Heavenly Father (vertical, structural, and particular). As chosen members, they make reciprocal promises in return and keep all their covenants with God and each other (horizontal, fluid, and universal), as a condition of staying within the divine covenant boundaries. In this way, the Mormon understanding of covenant is particular to their culture and community, and at the same time provides a universal invitation through mission and temple to all humans alive and dead, respectively. If their proselytizing missions were to be fully realized, all of humanity ever lived would belong to the Mormon vision of the covenant, vertically and horizontally, in anticipation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. By melding the Hebrew covenant with discipleship in Christ, the Mormon mission makes available to all of humanity the ‘fulness of the restored gospel under their priesthood authority.

Clearly, living in the Mormon covenant has practical implications for everyday life for saints in stakes such as those in the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission. The covenant boundaries are enforced by institutional and personal discipline, which Mormons call agency. In daily prayer, frequent church activity, and in Sacrament Services they work toward “eternal progress.” Eternal progression means progressing every day, little by little.

\(^3\) This simplification – “invite all to come unto Christ” – was emphasized to me by one president from the Fort Lauderdale Stake, a returned missionary from Canada, interview transcripts February 15, 25, and June 24, 2008. Every time I brought up the three-fold mission, he replied to this effect, “Remember, Gayle, whether missionary or humanitarian or temple or any work is all for the purpose of ‘inviting all to come unto Christ.’”
little, keeping an ‘eternal perspective,’ which helps to discipline daily life. They are reminded of and enact their chosenness as missionaries, as local leaders, and in temple work. To serve a mission is to keep the covenant, and carry on or establish a new family tradition of missionary service through lineages of belief (Hervieu-Léger 2000). Within the church, perfecting the saints in stake communities means striving and obediently keeping all their covenant promises to God, their families, and each other. Through these covenants made and kept, active members are recognized as ‘worthy’ to participate in sacred temple ordinances for their deceased family members.

The third plausibility structure – the temple – is where Mormons conduct their most sacred rites connecting the cosmic past and eternal future, in what they simply call ‘temple work.’ Although development of the temple participation as the third plausibility structure is beyond this dissertation, two considerations must be mentioned here. First, it is the case that all of the participants in this study hold “temple recommends” and participate in temple ordinances. The temple ordinances, or rituals, endow them for missions and marriage, seal them to their eternal mates and families, and anticipate eternity by redeeming their dead through invitations into baptismal covenant to which they have all committed. The Mormon three-fold mission – proclaim the gospel, perfect the saints, and redeem the dead – comes to profound fruition in the sacred temple where all Mormon activities have their culmination and cosmic significance. Second, to be awarded a temple is one of the greatest communal experiences in the Mormon world, recognizing the faithfulness of the local saints and spiritual maturation of an area. Within the temples, Latter-day Saints living in the FFLM will undertake the most important covenants that unite their entire family lineages, living and dead, in a chain of
memory. This invitation extends the Mormon lineage of belief into the ancestral past and the eternal future of family reunification. There is simply no other equivalent to the temple, based on the ancient Israelite model, in the history of Christianity. Recognizing the gravitas of this event necessitates another round of field work. The FFLM temple announcement at General Conference October 2009 came at the end of this fieldwork, just one year prior to the fiftieth anniversary of the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission.

**The Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission Case Study**

The Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission (FFLM) provides a case study of the three-fold Mormon mission: proselytizing mission, stakes in Zion, and temple. Guided by an interdisciplinary theoretical framework and illustrated through various ethnographic methods and narratives, the South Florida saints demonstrate in their religion some features of the old and new paradigms in the sociology of religion. The Mormon restoration of the new and everlasting covenant provides a sacred canopy (Berger 1967) of protection, meaning, and belonging through the plausibility structures of mission, stakes, and temple. Within this covenant structure, at the same time, their reciprocal covenants mobilize and expand their religion pursuant to new paradigm features as they daily reenact sacred covenants in mission and invite others to join. Whether the research participants are active missionaries spreading the gospel, returned missionaries and converts perfecting their stakes, or temple worthy practitioners, they cross and dwell along an international temporal and cosmic “sacroscape” (Tweed 2006). And importantly, Mormons engage every single day in a “chain of memory” that reenacts through embodied participation the sacred reciprocal covenants required to grow the church and perfect its members (Hervieu-Léger 2000).
While Mormonism protects and contains its covenant boundaries from centralized Salt Lake City communicated to area and local leaders, it is constantly pushing at the cultural boundaries of the global peoples it encounters on the mission periphery. The FFLM is home to over 27,000 ethnically diverse Latter-day Saints arranged into four geographic stakes, Miami South, Pompano Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami Lakes currently containing thirty-six wards and branches, an amalgam of English and Spanish designated congregations with other languages embedded and translated. The FFLM's boundaries, from southern Palm Beach County to Broward and Miami-Dade Counties to southern-most Key West, include the greater Fort Lauderdale – Miami megacity where it sits geographically as a major migration portal of the Americas (Stepick, Rey, and Mahler 2009). Research participants include Anglo Americans of pioneer descent and members from various Latin American and Caribbean ethnicities and countries, where they too, were pioneers in their homelands, or have converted in the U.S.

In this chapter, major changes have occurred in this region post-World War II, with the growth of aerospace, commerce, and entertainment industries, agricultural expansion, tourism, and immigration. According to Broward County’s website, as of the 2010 census, for the first time, Broward County is a “minority-majority” county, where the Non-Hispanic White population is now in the minority. Where Miami in 1960 was “almost completely controlled by an eighty percent majority of Non-Hispanic Whites” by 1997, its population was more than half Hispanic with 2.3 million immigrants, and it is

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4 As of June 2012, a mission president informed by email that the FFLM expanded in November 2011 to include the Stuart Florida Stake in Martin County, which is north of Pompano Beach Stake. (See Appendix E).

the “leading city in the United States for trade with the Caribbean and South America” (Boswell, Nogel, Paral, and Langendorf 2001: iv, 1). Two returned missionaries in this study served their missions in the early FFLM, which at that time included Puerto Rico. As will be shown, the FFLM’s stakes and their boundaries and congregations have recently shifted and reconfigured due to demographic transience and leadership changes in this area. Further, the cultural and linguistic diversity encountered in this mission demonstrates some of the same challenges that the international church has faced recruiting and keeping members active and contained within the covenant: expansion of the priesthood to all worthy men of African descent; retention of members; and cultural issues including correlation, language accommodation and translation. Challenges in this area include transience and immigration. When members move, are inactive or are not retained in the covenant, leadership suffers, and congregations are reconfigured further exacerbating the demands on leaders and active members.

After considering the history of this mission in this chapter, the following seven chapters provide the case study and field research among active missionaries, returned missionaries and converts in leadership, whose collective narratives are provided in a three-part organization: backgrounds and predisposing conditions for service; the field experience; and post-mission life. In Chapter 7, this mission is discussed as continuously served by approximately 150 young men and women active missionaries who proclaim the gospel, one of three necessary plausibility structures for the propagation of the faith. Active missionaries come from all over the world, but predominantly from the American Intermountain West or “Mormon culture region” (O’Dea 1957; Meinig 1965; Yorgason 2003). In this study, a small sample of eighteen
research participants includes active proselytizing active missionaries (AMs) in focus groups with follow-up questionnaires. Their participation demonstrates formative backgrounds and models, those features that preconditioned their missionary work. Also included are two ward mission leaders, and the mission presidency comprised of the mission president and wife serving in a ‘companion calling’ along with two counselors (one present, one past), also called mission presidents. Together these methods provide a better understanding of the mission field and how it comes together to mobilize missionary work.

Chapter 8 considers the missionary field service of this small sample of elders and sisters in the Fort Lauderdale and Miami areas. Missionaries mobilize at great effort, expense, and discipline by the embodied enactment of covenant ‘worthiness.’ They grapple with language accommodation, and receptivity as well as rejections, which often serve to reinforce their testimonies of the true church. Active mission service is a profound theological and ethical obligation necessary for the covenant restoration, which I experienced through learning the Preach My Gospel discussions from four elders in Chapter 9. Through teaching these lessons to all investigators, the missionaries recall the sacred covenant and invite all to come unto Christ into the covenant people. Finally, the mission anticipates LDS adulthood, making their mission participation entirely rational, where the mission serves as a coming of age passage in which most missionaries consolidate their testimonies and lifelong faith.

In this gateway mission, new Mormon converts have joined the RMs yielding an ethnically diverse membership and local leadership where they are fully engaged in perfecting the saints – their families and stake congregations, the second plausibility
structure of faith community. In Chapter 10, a sample of twenty-five men and women provides their family backgrounds and motivations for having served missions, an honored status in the church. They tell their past missionary experiences in Chapter 11, where they helped pioneer young Latin American stakes, as they encountered diverse cultures of Lamanites and Catholics, reckoning with the appeals and impediments for joining the church. Their service helped provide them with the necessary skills and motivation for adulthood in the church. In Chapter 12, the RMs discuss post-mission life. They are becoming the next generation of local leaders, share their family lives, demonstrate the family lineages of belief and service they have created, and serve their various callings. Some of them are called as stake presidents where they oversee work and welfare, and numerous church programs and auxiliary organizations such as the Bishop’s Storehouse, and Relief Society for women, all included in the narratives of Chapter 13. Participants include four stake presidents, one high council leader, two members of the Relief Society presidency, four ward bishops, one branch president, a public affairs director, a seminary leader, and the Bishop’s Storehouse Director. In their stakes they grapple with cultural issues such as language accommodation, and leadership turnover. Finally, as a reward for their fifty year history building stakes in Zion, the FFLM Latter-day Saints receive the announcement of their temple, the “pinnacle” of their religion.

**History and Change in the FFLM**

At the turn of the twentieth century, most of the church growth had been west of the Mississippi, centralized in the Rocky Mountain area or Mormon culture region (O’Dea 1957; Meinig 1965; Yorgason 2003). Once Utah became a state and the polygamy crisis was resolved, the LDS Church accelerated expansion easterly and
throughout the Americas, increasingly encountering different cultures and languages. Florida’s attraction to missionaries began quite early as Joseph Smith called two missionaries to serve a mission in Pensacola in April 1843 for which there is no record of their missions. Following Joseph Smith’s death, Brigham Young’s brother Phineas served a two-month mission in 1845 among the Cherokee, delivering copies of the Book of Mormon (Skousen 1996:3).

These early missions in North Florida and to the Florida Lamanites were not of great success as it was another fifty years before long-term missionary work resumed when Florida became part of the Southern States Mission. Despite widespread often violent anti-Mormonism in the south, the Southern States Mission flourished, becoming the most successful mission of the church at the turn of the century (Alexander 1986:221-222). Organized in 1895, the Florida Conference with Jacksonville as its headquarters dedicated its first chapel in 1906 (Skousen 1996:20). Thanks to the Henry Flagler Florida East Coast Railroad from Jacksonville to Miami, Julius Neubeck, Miami’s first Mormon, worked to extend the railroad on to Key West and the church into South Florida. By 1920 there were eighteen converts organized into the first Miami branch, which was dedicated in 1930 by Joseph Fielding Smith, grandson of Hyrum Smith and future president of the church (Skousen 1996:22-24). As the church enters a new mission field, it sends missionaries proclaiming the gospel and offering conversion into the church of Jesus Christ in small units called branches. While growth is slow an area remains a ‘district’ under the mission president. As these small branches of new members grow, the church sets up a regional mission district. By 1934 Florida membership had expanded to necessitate three districts: the Florida District centered in
Jacksonville, the Southern Florida District headquartered in Miami, and the West Florida District organized around Tampa (Skousen 1996:27). Outgrowing the 1930 chapel, the Miami Branch built its new chapel, which was dedicated in 1957 by President David O. McKay (Skousen 1996:47).

As mission districts successfully recruit new members, the church takes shape early around growing congregational units, or small branches (under the direction of a branch president and two counselors) and larger wards (headed by the bishop and two counselors). These congregations are then organized into stakes (under the stake president and two counselors) taking over ecclesiastical affairs from the mission leaders. Every individual member belongs geographically to a branch (headed by a president and two counselors) or ward (led by a bishop and two counselors) congregation, which is a unit within the larger stake (approximating a diocese). This means that the member cannot choose his or her congregation or stake; they are assigned geographically to control the sizes of the branches, wards (300-700 members) and stakes (1,500-3,000 members). The branch presidents and ward bishops are directly responsible for the spiritual and temporal well-being of all persons within their geographic unit, including non-members who are the subjects of missionary outreach.

These local branch presidents and ward bishops answer directly to their stake presidencies, the local liaisons with Salt Lake City. The stake leaders are directly responsible for protecting and disciplining their members through prayerful and proper guidance. These local leaders hold considerable power to lead their members, keeping them within the boundaries of the new and everlasting covenant restored. Likewise, they are responsible for fellowshipping the new members to facilitate their assimilation.
and learning, callings and retention. The stake presidents and mission presidents are positions considered equal in ecclesiastical power with differing but collaborative, interdependent responsibilities. The mission presidency and mission’s proselytizing efforts are in service of unit (branch and ward) membership growth while membership ecclesiastical affairs are conducted locally by unit leadership (branch presidents and ward bishops) directed by each stake presidency.

The “first stake of Zion organized in the south” was Jacksonville, 1947, the Church’s 163rd stake, and only the fourth church stake east of the Mississippi (Skousen 1996:32-33). By the 1960s Florida was wide open for settlement, tourism, and missionary work as the aerospace program coalesced around NASA in Titusville, Disney around Orlando, and Cubans fled the 1959 Revolution in successive waves to the Miami shores. The Florida interior was also wide open for agricultural expansion on vast grasslands for cattle and horses. The corporate church acquired most of its land for the Deseret Ranch in central Florida during the 1950s for the purposes of investment and cattle ranching, importing thirteen families from Nevada to operate the ranch (Ellsworth 1990). Totaling nearly 300,000 acres, the ranch is the “largest cow-calf operation in the United States” (Church Almanac 2012: 342). Near Orlando, this area became Florida’s second stake in 1958, followed by Tampa the following year (Skousen 1996:47-49). The Florida Mission was carved from the Southern States Mission in 1960, followed by the fourth Florida stake created in Miami in what would become the FFLM (Skousen 1996:51).

The Florida Mission established 1960, begat the Florida South Mission in 1971, after which the name was changed to the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission in 1974. As
the perfect gateway for church expansion into the Caribbean and the Americas, the FFLM has been served by twenty predominantly Anglo mission presidents. By 1970 the mission was served by two geographically expansive stakes, Ft. Lauderdale and Miami. The Caribbean District included Spanish-speakers in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico; Haitian Creole in Haiti; and English in Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Trinidad and Tobago. In 1965 Mission President Ned J. Winder dedicated the Florida Indian reservations for preaching among the Lamanites. One of his successors, President Arden Hutchings who served from 1972-1975, invited tribal chiefs to the mission home for dinner where missionaries shared with the chiefs their “heritage and destiny.” According to this account, “Seminoles have a legend that their ancient records were lost in New York State” (Knowles 1975). Officials were also responding to the growing Hispanic population as the Miami Second Ward began a Sunday school class as early as 1964.

The first of the Spanish local congregations emerged in 1971, including one branch in Hialeah, and the first ward opened in 1978 (Skousen 1996:56). With the 1979 revelation that extended the priesthood to all men of African descent, problems in expansion to the Afro-diasporas were immediately resolved in the U. S., as well as the Caribbean and Brazil, two places from which immigrants to the FFLM have come.

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6 Photos of the mission presidents with their surnames indicate they are predominantly Anglo American ethnicities with no Hispanic representation in the office over fifty years. As has been explained to me by participants, to serve as a full-time mission president is to give up three years of income and take no salary in service, put a career on hold in midlife, relocate at great distances often away from family to serve, and return to careers; or in other words, they must be relatively ‘well-off’ and hold skills of professional leadership capability. Consequently, there is a larger potential pool of suitable Anglo American men than Hispanics. Of the two full-time mission presidents I met with during the two projects, both were from Utah; one was a surgeon and the other a professor at BYU whose families were grown. The new mission president as of July 2008 arrived with a family of five children. (http://floridaftlauderdalemissionnews.blogspot.com/search/label/Former%20Mission%20Presidents). Accessed February 2, 2012.
Recalling Missions in the Early FFLM

During the early 1970s two returned missionary (RM) participants in this study were active missionaries in this mission, which was then known as the Florida South Mission, proselytizing in Miami and Puerto Rico. The Hialeah Branch, in an area of Miami heavily populated by Cuban immigrants, was served in 1970 by an elder from Idaho in a Spanish-speaking assignment:

I served a Spanish-speaking mission in 1970, transferred from Bethesda Mission down here to this area – about nine months – at the time the area was huge. My first area was in Hialeah; four of us covered the Hialeah Branch, all elders, I think. I was there for a month and then I came to the SW area and spent the rest of my time here with probably ten to twelve missionaries under my zone. Zones stretched from Ft. Lauderdale down to Homestead, not as far south as the Keys. Zones were English and Spanish.7

Fleeing Castro’s revolution, Cuban migration to the FFLM in the 1960s and 1970s was primarily into Hialeah and the “Little Havana” area around Calle Ocho. The Cuban diaspora has been one of South Florida’s most vibrant and visible communities in successive waves of immigration. Predominantly Catholic, they built in 1973 the Miami shrine to Our Lady of Charity, the Cuban patroness (Tweed 1997). By the 1990s the Cuban sector had become politically powerful holding, among others, the mayor’s office of Miami. This community has been targeted for religious recruitment by evangelicals (Mahler and Hansing 2005) and Mormons, alike.

The people coming in from Cuba – it was before the Mariel Boatlift – were part of the exodus. They were concentrated toward the downtown area . . . that was a much poorer area [among those] newer here to Miami. [As they] left that area and moved west, your economics improved and that shift was westerly. Doctors and engineers worked to get jobs that took them more west, out toward the turnpike.8

7 Interview transcript, RML dated June 24, 2008.
8 Ibid.
In Little Havana, another RM, a native of Argentina, served a Spanish-speaking assignment in 1971, and described difficult access and receptivity among potential converts despite their concentration, working in missionary zones:

[Cubans] were highly concentrated in apartments, where each zone was 20 x 20 blocks. At 6 a.m. [we'd] eat and study with companion; 9 a.m. out the door; afternoons tracking and meetings; evenings more of the same. Most Cubans had arrived 1960-61-62 and were very Catholic, hard-working individuals, families, and two jobs; hard to access. . . . [We did ] mostly teaching with few conversions.³

Mission zones are geographically highly variable and are comprised of groups of missionaries with a zone leader. Mission zones and their subdivided districts provide a network of opportunities for individual missionaries to rise among their peers and exercise authority in small measure, developing leadership skills that are requisite for adult life in the church, ultimately sustaining and revitalizing this lay religion (Shepherd and Shepherd 2001:161-181; Givens 2004:127-128). The zones are organized administratively solely for the mission president’s purposes in support of the missionary work conducted within the wards and branches. Zones may be comprised of any combination of language assignments and contemporary mission zones are no longer one-language designated as in past decades; in other words, a zone may contain several language combinations, in service to the ward bishops and branch presidents. The missionaries serve in companionships with a senior and junior missionary, the senior providing mentoring, language and cultural instruction, and surveillance. The companionships help instill self-discipline, with each missionary accountable to the ‘father’ of the mission, its president. While zones serve mission administrations,

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³ Interview transcript, RMM dated June 25, 2008.
congregations that arise from membership growth are served by the stake and units' leadership and may be language designated, responding more flexibly to various language demands in the congregations.

The church operates from what missionaries call ‘centers of strength.’ Mission resources are targeted toward urban areas that serve as local hubs for missionary work, such as Fort Lauderdale and Miami. From the centers, the missionary work radiates outward into surrounding environs. Therefore, the urban characteristics of this church are apparent, and along with urbanism come diversity and cosmopolitanism. As a result, language-designated congregations with bilingual missionaries have played an important role in the vitality of this mission.

Both bilingual RMs were then sent from Miami to Puerto Rico, which had the largest number of Mormons in the Caribbean District, an approximate 1,500, and its first Spanish Branch in 1970 (“United States territory: Puerto Rico” Church News 2010). Both RMs recalled challenges in Puerto Rico where missionaries were spread very thin across the islands with minimal missionary organization.

Missionaries tour[ed] the island of all the different cities, around thirty missionaries spread out among eight to ten cities. . . . [I was to] make sure they [other zone leaders] were staying in contact with those missionaries. [In my mission] I was more interested as a zone leader in working with members, spending more time building them up rather than tracting, so I had that same philosophy then as now [as a bishop] and it has come clear around.10

In addition to covering large geographic zones in large mission districts with few missionaries, the other RM described missionary work in Puerto Rico as a “totally

10 Interview transcript, RML dated June 24, 2008
different experience” due in large part to the difficulties of proselytizing prior to the revelation opening the priesthood to men of African descent.

1972-73 was before the 1978 priesthood revelation. Puerto Rico was fifty percent black and the other fifty percent mixed. Proselytizing was totally different – we had to say we were conducting a survey instead of bringing a message of the restored gospel. [The survey] was an attempt to gauge ethnicity. The church position was not to proselyte blacks because they couldn’t hold the priesthood. So, they could come to church but that was it.11

Despite these racial restrictions, Puerto Ricans mostly Catholic including a priest found appeals in the LDS faith, especially attracted to its family-centrism, both in doctrine and in praxis. Tracting for six months in a small branch of fifteen members in Arecibo, he and his companion labored from 9:00 in the morning to 9:00 at night.

In the last two months we found a family interested. She was a former Catholic, who couldn’t accept the concept of limbo. Her husband was not too receptive until the fourth lesson when we discussed the Plan of Salvation, which gave their dead son an opportunity to accept salvation. He said, “Finally! A church that reunites the family!”12

Their branch president’s children attended a Catholic school where a priest was a teacher, who sat for the lessons. The priest “liked the Family Home Evening program and wanted to know more if not for conversion’s sake but for better understanding.” He even introduced the missionaries at mass and invited his parishioners to “listen to our discussions if they wanted to – a real ecumenical moment.” Through the priest’s connections, the missionaries taught a section on Mormonism at the Catholic University.13

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11 Interview transcript, RMM dated June 25, 2008.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
Although one might not consider a Catholic nation such as Puerto Rico to be friendly to Mormon missionaries, Catholicism did not turn out to be the problem, and in fact there has been a demonstrated demand for some features of the LDS Church, which today numbers 20,785 in PR (Church Almanac 2012:549). But the problem for proselytizing in Puerto Rico prior to 1979 was an internal structural problem in the supply-side of the LDS Church, to which the missionary returned:

Growth was slow though. If investigators were still interested by the end of the sixth lesson, we had a seventh lesson on the priesthood. They really had to understand that some may not be able to hold the priesthood. Then they accept or reject. We baptized three new members, two black men who knew they couldn’t hold the priesthood. Like the Levites – only God can decide who can be a priest. . . . We don’t know [why], only the Heavenly Father knows.  

This missionary served about seven years prior to the revelation that overturned the priesthood ban for men of African descent. In the Americas, the expanding membership in Brazil helped catalyze President Kimball’s prayers for a remedial revelation, anticipating the opening of the São Paulo Temple. For Cardell Jacobson (2004), the revelation should do for the church what Civil Rights should have done in the U.S., resolving what W. E. B. DuBois called the “problem of the color line.” But there is still work to do, in the churches as well. Churches not only have the opportunity but the “moral injunction” to eliminate racial barriers caused by misunderstandings and prejudices. “The LDS Church is particularly well situated to do this because local congregations are based on geographical areas rather than on recruitment. Thus in urban areas, the LDS Church often has multiracial, multiethnic congregations” (2004:3) as in the FFLM.

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14 Interview transcript, RMM dated June 25, 2008.
For me, [Puerto Rico] is special because of the experiences I had with people who joined without the benefit of the priesthood. Growth was slow due to this [priesthood exclusion] in Puerto Rico and in the Dominican Republic also. But there [was] acceptance of the church, the people who joined were all walks of life, middle class and mostly nominally Catholic.\textsuperscript{15}

However, competitors who had not imposed a racial barrier were also working the island to much success, employing methods that the LDS would never use: big revivals and mass baptisms. "Pentecostal and evangelical churches were also growing on the island – had big rallies that drew thousands, more of a revival than mass baptisms. My first exposure to Pentecostals. My companion and I attended one revival on the island. There were also Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses."\textsuperscript{16}

The LDS pair tried varying approaches, including teaching the priest and lecturing at the university, they played pick-up basketball with high school and college students, “just to increase some social relationships.” But the priesthood prohibition was a serious social barrier. After six months he was transferred to San Juan. He continued that there were “[t]wenty missionaries on an island of three million people, so the number of missionaries was not huge because of the challenges we faced because of the church [policy on the priesthood”\textsuperscript{17}

This RM remembered other multicultural features of his mission experience in the FFLM. As an Argentine, part of that diversity was experienced in twenty-three companion missionaries from Texas, Arizona, North Carolina, Idaho, California, Colorado, and the rest from Utah, predominantly from the Intermountain West “since

\textsuperscript{15} Interview transcript, RMM dated June 25, 2008.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
that was where the bulk of the church membership was. Now, there are more local missionaries staying at home. Generally, [however] they don’t want you to serve in your own backyard; like [they will send missionaries to] Argentina from Chile and in Chile from Argentina. Or you’ll serve in your country, but outside of your region.”¹⁸ Potential new members on the mainland were an eclectic mix, as well, requiring missionary adaptation.

[In] Plant City [south of Miami] we were mistaken for insurance salesmen; ‘we’re coming to sell you a different kind of insurance.’ Mostly very southern people. In our mission we had Spanish, English, and to the Seminole Reservation, and at the Church Ranch Deseret. Worked ranching during the day and then teaching ranch hands during the evenings. . . . And Miami Beach at that time was ninety percent Jewish – not much receptivity. We had a Jewish convert who had given us advice on how to approach Jewish families and understand. It was different – you can talk about Elohim rather than Heavenly Father. The vocabulary changes. Most Jewish homes I came across, like Catholic, are Jewish by tradition but not practicing. I had a mixture of experiences in the north [of the mission] – Bible belt Baptists, evangelicals, and mostly non-receptive.¹⁹

By both missionary accounts, growth was slow during the 1970s in Florida, where most people are more affluent than in Puerto Rico, which is consistent with other missionary narratives. More affluent people are generally less receptive because they don’t feel the discomforts of relative socio-economic deprivations. Historically, Mormonism has drawn its converts including Joseph Smith and family and subsequent followers from society’s marginalized people, such as in many Latin American countries. Increasingly, the missionaries find good receptions in the middle classes. He went on, regarding Florida versus Puerto Rico where mission work was most gratifying, “versus Puerto Rico, a different culture and language, more open and I thoroughly enjoyed Puerto Rico.

¹⁸ Interview transcript, RMM dated June 25, 2008.
¹⁹ Ibid.
A totally different experience. I put on a lot of weight, beans and rice and they really fed us; new cooking. It [missionary experience] is a life changing experience.”^{20}

Through the mid-1980s robust growth in Puerto Rico resulted in the San Juan Mission and four stakes by 1987, which were discontinued from 1993 to 1996 due to outmigration to the United States (“United States territory: Puerto Rico” *Church News* 2010). In 1981 the Dominican Republic established its first mission in Santo Domingo. As of October 1983, a new West Indies Mission was created out of some FFLM territory, including Jamaica, the Bahamas, and part of Haiti, the Lesser Antilles, Barbados, Trinidad, and Tobago (*News of the Church* 1983).

While the Caribbean region of the FFLM mission was divided out, the mainland mission experienced other demographic shifts, according to a long term member, a sister RM. First, in the mid-1980s, “gradually older [Anglo] members in midlife left and moved to Orlando, and north.” Second, a twenty year campaign was begun by Motorola in Plantation recruiting BYU graduates; the first four ‘Motorola Mormons’ arrived in 1982-83, and each year brought more. Third, Broward County experienced a surge of Hispanics post-Andrew 1992. Weston, a suburb west of Fort Lauderdale near the Everglades had an “influx of priesthood holders who were [corporate] executives, but there are also trailer parks and patio homes, so it is demographically diverse. About fifty-five percent of Weston is Hispanic – it’s called ‘Westonzuela’ for the Venezuelans moving there.”^{21} During the mission presidency of Ken Zabriskie (1982-83), “missionary work among the Spanish-speaking community increased dramatically, and thousands

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^{20} Interview transcript, RMM dated June 25, 2008.

^{21} Interview transcript RSG, April 13, 2008.
joined the Church during the 1980s. Still, it was not until the early 1990s that the Spanish-speaking wards started developing rapidly” (Skousen 1996: 57).

Generally, there was discomfort placing ethnic members in segregated wards (Skousen 1996). In 1989, there were only two Spanish wards. But gradually, Spanish-speaking members were called to local leadership positions and the response to the demand for language accommodation was expanded. In 1990, after two more Spanish wards were established, the Miami Stake was re-organized in 1994 as the first Spanish-speaking stake in the FFLM, calling a Colombian stake president (Skousen 1996:57). The first Spanish-speaking stake made southeast regional and state history, with the creation of the Miami Spanish Stake during the 1994 regional conference.22 President of the North America Southeast Area, Elder Alexander B. Morrison of the Seventy told 4,500 South Florida saints, “The creation of this new stake was approved by the First Presidency and the Twelve because the Lord said that ‘every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language’ (D&C 90:11)” (Ryan 1994).

On one hand, language accommodation, for every member to hear the gospel in her native language, has helped guide church policies toward minority converts throughout its history (Embry 1997; Jensen 1987). The other ideal espouses unity in all things, where are all one in Christ, and because “God in his divine wisdom revealed the gospel in the English language” then English should be the church language; minority converts should assimilate as soon as possible (Jensen 1987:274-275). Certainly, both of these ideals are demonstrated in the development of the FFLM. These linguistic

22 The first Spanish-speaking stake in the U. S. was established in Los Angeles in 1984 on an experimental basis (Embry 1997:63-65; Orton 1987:304). The Huntington Park West Stake remains listed in the Church Almanac 2012 (331).
tensions have been felt at all levels of leadership within the church since its earliest
days, across all geographic borders (Embry 1997; Jensen 1987; Tullis 1978). But the
tensions are reckoned with at the local stake and unit level and are held by participants
in this mission, which are discussed further later on perfecting the saints in their stake
congregations.

By 1994, Florida made LDS history in a second way: its first temple in Orlando
was dedicated October 9, 1994, 100 years after the early Florida Conference began full-
time missionary work. At the dedication, Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Seventy stated
that in retrospect years from now, “We will see an even more righteous commitment to
covenants and a heightened missionary spirit that accelerated with our having a temple
in our midst. The temple will do more for the Saints in Florida than we can imagine, and
the Church will prosper as never before” (Jorgensen 1994). Prior to its open house
welcoming 90,000 visitors and dedication, active members traveled to Washington D. C.
or Atlanta to conduct temple work (Skousen 1996:59, 74). The construction of this
temple came as a culminating sign of Florida’s faithful growth and maturity “increasing
Zion’s borders” (Merkley 2000) while the creation of a new “stake in Zion” demonstrated
significant expansion among Florida’s Hispanics.

With global expansion accelerating among numerous languages and cultures,
especially in the Americas where most church growth has occurred, the church in 1960
brought into ‘correlation’ all study and activities of the church, establishing three
committees: one for primary, one for youth, and one for adults. In 1972, an actual
church department – the Department of Internal Communications – was created “to
plan, correlate, prepare, translate, print, and distribute instructional materials and
periodicals. As part of this reorganization, the First Presidency created the Correlation Department and placed all organization, curricula, and periodicals under the direction of the priesthood” (May 1992:325). A study of the 1992 correlation of the Spanish hymnal is instructive on the effects of correlation, where some Spanish-speaking congregations in the Dominican Republic and Oakland, California were left disappointed to the point where some individual wards refused to use the hymnal. Although earlier Spanish hymnals had shown a “burst of creativity” by 1992, “the Spanish hymnal contained very little distinctive material and virtually no material authored by native Spanish-speaking saints. . . . Correlation has created a dynamic where everything flows outward from the English-speaking saints” (Duffy and Olaiz 2002:110-111). Rather than letting the Spanish-speaking members of the global church create their own hymnal, the highest priority was correlation: weeding out most of the Spanish hymns with no equivalent in the English hymnal; creating new translations to update the Spanish hymnal with developments in English LDS hymnody; and revising existing texts, not just for grammatical or doctrinal correctness, but to make them more literal translations of their English originals (Duffy and Olaiz 2002:110-111).

Daymon Smith’s study of correlation shows that any proposed original texts submitted to the First Presidency Correlation Committee must first apply the “goodness test” consisting of six questions, including “Will the proposal lead people toward making and keeping covenants?” (Smith 2007:443-444). Without knowing then the particular reception of the hymnal in the mainland Spanish-speaking units, several participants in the FFLM considered correlation necessary to coordinate and contain doctrine and administration across a large geographic area with expanding and mobile membership as seen in the FFLM. For them, correlation, with its standardization of all church
programs in numerous languages, is the best way to ensure that everyone gets the same content, and learns the church programs.\textsuperscript{23}

The 1994 stake reorganization and creation of the Miami Spanish Stake, according to a public affairs official who at the time of the reorganization served in the Stake High Council and as Second Counselor in the Stake Presidency, resulted in the geographic and language overlap with the Homestead Stake and the Fort Lauderdale Stake, that allowed members to attend in Spanish or English wards. At the same time, the old Miami and Fort Lauderdale Stakes were redrawn, resulting in a new Fort Lauderdale Stake and the new Pompano Beach Stake.\textsuperscript{24}

At the Miami Spanish Stake’s establishment, Elder Morrison predicted Hispanic expansion in the FFLM. “Great blessings will come as the Spirit of the Lord is poured out on the Hispanic members in this area. This Spanish stake will provide opportunities for many more to participate in building the kingdom of the Lord in this part of the world” (Ryan 1994). By 1996, there were fifteen Spanish-speaking units in Florida (Embry 1997: 65), followed by a second Spanish stake in 1998 named Hialeah. For five years from 1998 to 2003, two of the five stakes were Spanish-designated or Spanish majority; Miami Spanish (1994) and Hialeah Gardens (Spanish) (1998), respectively; along with three English stakes of Pompano Beach (1994), Ft. Lauderdale (1970), and Homestead (1992). In addition to the growing Spanish-speaking units, by 2003 there was a

\textsuperscript{23} While the full Book of Mormon is translated into eighty-two languages and partially translated into another twenty-five (http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/book-mormon-150-million), the church has recently launched another service program at BYU, where RMs with numerous languages skills are enrolled, to enlist translators for other church materials (http://universe.byu.edu/index.php/2011/11/21/calling-all-translators-lds-church-launches-new-service-program/). Accessed October 20, 2012.

\textsuperscript{24} Email from a public affairs director dated February 11, 2008, in the possession of author.
Portuguese Branch in the Fort Lauderdale Stake, and the Haitian Creole Morningside Branch of the Hialeah Gardens Stake in Miami’s Little Haiti.  

This configuration worked for several years, according to the stake official, “until the stake president decided that they did not have enough leadership to adequately manage the stake properly.” With Salt Lake City’s approval, two new stakes redrew their boundaries eliminating the overlap, which yielded the new Miami Lakes Spanish Stake, “which is technically an English-speaking stake with Spanish and Haitian Creole units” (although the Spanish speaking units outnumbered the English speaking units). “The Ft. Lauderdale boundaries were also reconfigured along county lines allowing for better administration of youth activities in different counties with differing school schedules.”  

The stakes were reorganized again in 2003, consolidating and renamed the Miami Lakes Florida Stake, without language designation. It included eight wards and branches, a Haitian branch, five Spanish, and two English wards. Currently, a Young Singles (YSA) ward was added and the Haitian branch was “dissolved and became part of an English ward.” With the Miami Lakes Stake and the Miami Spanish Stake realigned, the local church attempted to be responsive to the local needs of the diverse community and balance available leadership. 

In 2006, the First Presidency announced the creation of a separate Caribbean Area, which is served by the Santo Domingo Temple and eight missions. The new area

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26 Email from a public affairs director dated February 11, 2008, in the possession of author.

27 Interview transcript, June 29, 2008 with stake president.
includes all the island nations of the Caribbean from the Bahamas, to the Greater and Lesser Antilles southerly-most Trinidad and Tobago, which was formerly in the greater North America Southeast Area, including the FFLM. The new Caribbean area is expanded to the most northerly countries of South America, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana (“Southeast area divided; Caribbean area created” *Church News* 2006). The Bahamas, as part of the mission district but not a stake, were formerly served by missionaries from the FFLM, while the temporal needs for its branches were met through the Dominican Republic. Although all editions of the *Church Almanac* list the Bahamas in the FFLM, this mission no longer sends missionaries to the Bahamas. As fieldwork for this project began in the fall of 2006, there were five stakes: Pompano Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Miami Lakes, Miami Spanish, and Homestead. By 2008 the stakes would reconfigure again, which is resumed later in this study. In 2009 this mission made history in a way that will forever change its landscape: a new temple was announced to be built in the Fort Lauderdale Stake, demonstrating the maturation of the mission area in a dynamic and vibrant multi-cultural Americas gateway.

The most remarkable features of what might appear to be top-down bureaucratic administrative rigidity are the church’s capacities for adaptation to various language requirements, membership needs, and leadership changes. On the other hand, vacillating expansion and contraction of language accommodation is symptomatic of larger issues within the church that attempts to deal with demographic change. This challenge is not unique to the FFLM, although gateway cities are unique in their

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28 Interview transcript, June 25, 2007 with a former mission president.

29 Email from a mission president in author’s possession, dated June 22, 2012.
geography vis-à-vis immigration. Immigration is a profoundly controversial issue in the U. S., and among Mormons, even within families.

Migration in the FFLM

Of all the rewards and difficulties of managing diverse, ever-changing and growing congregations, the most difficult of all membership challenges for stake presidents, ward bishops, and branch presidents remains immigration and the struggles of migrating peoples:

Issues with undocumented people who struggle economically and socially and educationally. . . [We are] constantly training new leaders in their new responsibilities—a lot of first generations in the church. How to live the principles of the gospel and be faithful — those are the challenges. It is constant. . . . But all in all, the [immigrant] people are wonderful, who give of themselves and serve and are humble.30

While the transience of migration brings leadership challenges suggestive of white man’s burden however unintended, undocumented immigration brings institutional church challenges. Missionaries are to invite all people to come unto Christ, without concern for documentation. Then, because membership concerns are primarily dealt with at the stake and unit level by the stake presidents, ward bishops, and branch presidents and their counselors, the difficulties of helping integrate undocumented people into congregations fall within the parameters of local leadership. One ward bishop said, “The biggest disadvantage for South Florida I see right now is the pressure to live here economically for those that may not have the paperwork. We don’t ask too

30 Interview transcript with stake president dated April 8, 2008.
much about it [status], but it is a challenge.”31 One mission president recalled his service as a ward bishop several years prior:

The church does not get into the government or officers’ jobs. When I was a bishop, my first counselor was an immigration officer. In that unit were more than half illegal but I knew for some reason that I could not talk about it in my role as bishop, so it was not to be discussed because the church cannot help in this matter. So, I said to my members: This is my first counselor and he is under oath that if he knows that somebody is illegal, he has to take it to the authorities. So don’t tell him and he’ll ignore it because he is not supposed to act on suspicion, but on confession. So don’t talk to anybody about your status because this is a church and it is separate from the state.32

The tensions of converting an undocumented person come into contradiction with the twelfth and thirteenth Articles of Faith, respectively, “in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law,” and “being honest, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men…”33 An environment of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ is largely unchanged in this mission but recent quiet rumors of increasing deportations, sometimes of men in church leadership positions, have enraged some members at the separations of families, yet made others circumspect about the consequences of personal agency. In one family from Guatemala, the father had experienced a deportation from California to Guatemala, which ultimately led him to meet his wife, a Mormon. His son could see the work of God’s hand in the deportation. But his mother was upset with recent anti-immigration sentiments, especially those of Mitt Romney. Her son reminded her of the Articles of Faith, to obey the law of the land. “He [Mitt Romney] was very heavy on immigration, which my mom was a little upset with. I said mom, it says in the Thirteenth

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31 Interview transcript, RML dated June 24, 2008.

32 Interview transcript with mission president dated April 14, 2008.

Article of Faith that we believe in upholding the laws of the land. So, if they’re here illegal[ly] then they’re not upholding the laws.” After Arizona’s SB 1070 passage, members are taking a wait and see attitude given the more recent Utah Compact (2011), where the church provided a rare political endorsement as a more humane compromise on the problem of immigration (Stack 2011).

Undocumented immigration is divisive for the nation and divisive for the church as well, and apparently registers as a divisive issue in families along generational lines. But despite all of this demographic change and community challenges in the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission during the past fifty years, Mormons understand and remind each other that this “work is the Lord’s work” and they are called to be one in Christ. The thirteenth Article of Faith continues, “Indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—we believe all things, we hope all things, we have enduring many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.” Having endured many things, their faithful spiritual and numerical growth yields the reward of a temple, the culmination of fifty years of mission labor.

In conclusion, the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission contributes a case study in the three-fold mission of the Church, specifically among active missionaries who proclaim the gospel, and returned missionaries and converts who perfect the saints in stakes in Zion. Employing rational revelation through mission work, Mormons are guided by the covenant idea to structure a sacred canopy of protection and meaning, belief and

34 Interview transcript RME dated February 10, 2008.
belonging with particular boundaries, while simultaneously spreading that covenant message universally to peoples of all cultures in the Americas. In this mission, as the covenant is spread, transforming lives and landscape, the saints keep the covenant by making new covenants, which form a chain of collective remembrance (Hervieu-Léger 2000), connecting the primordial and ancestral past with the eternal future. It is remembrance through active covenant making that the sacred ancient covenant between God and his people is restored, unlike in past dispensations.

This gateway to the Americas brings a surprising number of Anglo saints of pioneer lineage into covenant community with Mormon converts immigrated from across Latin America and the Caribbean, all working together to build up the kingdom’s stakes in Zion. Former Hialeah Gardens Stake President Mario Ayaviri, a native of Bolivia, was quoted in LDS Church News, “I don’t see races or nationalities. I don’t remember if the members of my stake are Argentines or Guatemalans, they are all LDS. I feel the same about my Anglo brothers and sister, they are all LDS.” Former Fort Lauderdale Stake President George Holden, a native of Arizona, added looking out from the pulpit, “I think to myself, ‘This is what the celestial kingdom must be like—a rainbow of people’” (Swensen 2000).35

Not unlike the missionary challenges Paul encountered in the apostolic church, his mission was to make a particular Jewish covenant idea universal throughout the Gentile world. Emulating Paul, the model missionary, this American church proclaims the gospel to all people, and celebrates unity in diversity: “There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.

35 Presidents Ayaviri and Holden participated in the 2003 project. By 2008 both had resettled in the Utah area.
Furthermore, if you belong to Christ you are the descendants of Abraham, which means you inherit all that was promised” (Galatians 3:28-29). In Mormon mission, what was true for the ancient Galatians is equally true today as the new and everlasting covenant is restored for the final time by the Heavenly Father’s missionaries.
CHAPTER 7
BECOMING ACTIVE MISSIONARIES

In 2010, the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission (FFLM) celebrated its fiftieth anniversary as part of the original Florida Mission. Commemorating the occasion, Apostle Jeffrey R. Holland, reminded its missionaries, "You stand in a long, gleaming line of God's most devoted soldiers. Look down that line at the legions who have served before you. Others, coming later and equally anxious, will take courage from looking down the line and seeing you. We are in this with the noble and great ones."1 The point of Mormon mission is for inviting all people to come unto Christ in baptism. Each new generation of missionaries is taught that they belong in God's chosen lineage and they will adopt others into this lineage through

missionary work as part of the Lord's covenant with Abraham . . . Nations of the earth will be blessed by our efforts and by the labor of our posterity. The literal seed of Abraham and those who are gathered into his family by adoption [conversion] receive those promised blessings—predicated upon acceptance of the Lord and obedience to his commandments (Missionary Preparation Student Manual 2005:2; emphasis in the original).

Baptism in Jesus Christ and into the lineage of Abraham, as Paul first instructed two millennia ago, yields salvation among the followers of the Savior, the next generation of disciples. This Mormon amalgam of the restored Hebrew covenant with renewed Christian discipleship produces a core nucleus of worthy Mormons who proclaim the gospel, which they call doing 'the Lord's work.' This Mormon understanding of mission is to bring to fruition the universal restoration of the new and everlasting covenant.

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The *Guide to the Scriptures* instructs that this new and everlasting covenant revealed contains the “fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ” with its priesthood authority to conduct the sacred ordinances for man’s eternal life. But a sacred canopy as the new and everlasting covenant is only one part of the story; as a framework, it provides the boundaries of belief, behavior and belonging, and imparts meaning, purpose and protection within the covenant. Additionally, the new and everlasting covenant animates the church’s missionary enterprise. The endowment of God’s covenant brings the obligation to share it with the world’s people. “When people accept the gospel and promise to keep God’s commandments, God covenants to give them the blessings of his new and everlasting covenant” (*The Guide to the Scriptures*). Therefore, within the structure is a very fluid and dynamic global missionary movement where individuals rationally choose to proclaim this restored gospel, and where investigators in 185 countries around the world rationally choose to belong to this church. Missionaries are taught to emphasize that this religion, predominantly situated in the Americas, is nevertheless “a faith for all cultures” (Tullis 1978). By inviting all to come unto Christ, missionaries help “people realize that the Church is not just another religion, nor is it an American church. Rather, it is a restoration of the “fulness of [the] gospel” (*D&C* 1:23), *the same as was revealed and taught from the beginning*” (*Preach My Gospel* 2004:7). Only through the necessity of mission can such a religious tradition realize the Mormon’s “titanic design” of converting the entire world (Bloom 1992:94) and beyond.

This chapter first considers missionary work as the first of the three plausibility structures of Mormonism: proclaim the gospel (missionary work); perfect the saints (in family stakes) and redeem the dead (temple work). Missionary work provides the
indispensable engine of growth with the earliest missions recorded among family and friends, and immediately to strangers. The new religious movement was a missionary movement before it was anything else. Avoiding the modern, secular “crisis of plausibility” (Berger 1967:128) Mormons have tenaciously held on to this missionary tradition as normative in a post-modern, post-colonial world where all meta-meaning and traditions are supposed to have been lost and where mission is often unpopular despite its ubiquity. However, Danièle Hervieu-Léger argues, “Given such a [post-modern] context, the deliberate choice of invoking the authority of a tradition, by becoming incorporated into a continuing lineage, constitutes one possible, post-traditional way of constructing self-identity among others . . . [in the] search for community, and his or her memories and longings” (2000:165). Plausibility structures are maintained by those human conversations in communities and traditions that validate and reinforce the reality as plausible (Berger 1997:20-21). Through Mormon mission, this shared tradition is communicated and mediated from the past, recapitulated in the present, and projected into the future through the missionaries. It is not enough to say the covenant is restored such as in the old paradigm of religion; as in the new paradigm, religion is also animated by a chosen people who embody its recollection, which is the work of missionaries. Active restoration of the ancient sacred canopy of covenant is institutionalized and mobilized in Mormon mission.

In 2003, the General Authorities “raised the bar” for missionary service. To be a member of the LDS missionary corps means being qualified or worthy, keeping the covenant by making new covenants every day to stay morally pure and religiously active. Having met this bar, active missionaries in the FFLM volunteer their lives to
discipline and obedience, which will become for them markers of identity in emulation of the leadership in their church. The active missionary participants in Chapters 7, 8, and 9 include a small snowball sample of eighteen men and women who were solicited with the help of the elders teaching me, two mission presidents, and the mission office.

Pursuant to the advice of the mission president, a focus group of men was planned in Fort Lauderdale and in Miami between sessions of the April 2008 General Conference in two-hour windows. Their participation would depend entirely upon whether they had prior commitments to investigators or members; my request came third. Participation in Fort Lauderdale was maximized with ten requests and ten participants. In Miami, there were only two elders available. Four women in Miami participated in a luncheon in June 2008. Fifteen of the missionaries followed up with questionnaires.

The missionaries’ contributions are best organized into a tri-part discussion including background and predisposing conditions for mission service, which demonstrate their family missionary lineages along with an understanding into their motivations. These background narratives provide the latter part of this Chapter 7. Their active mission field experience in the FFLM is the topic of Chapter 8. Along with these active missionaries, seven FFLM mission officials and their wives are included, whose interviews provide an understanding of the mission and its workings. Finally, four elders (two who participated in the focus group) taught me the gospel lessons in Chapter 9 from Preach My Gospel (2004), which is the official missionary proselytizing manual. Because all members are exhorted to ‘follow the prophet’ and because missionaries and leaders alike often quote them, all chapters draw from selective primary documents and speeches of the General Authorities.
Mission as a Plausibility Structure for Mobilization

Without mission, the Mormon hope of converting the entire world’s people to the new and everlasting covenant could not be realized or attempted. Speaking with active missionaries in the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission, I asked if they could imagine the LDS Church without missionaries. Their wide-eyed expressions betrayed the inconceivability of such an idea, at which moment one laughed shaking his head as the other exclaimed laughingly in a loud, “Oh, no!” For these missionaries, the idea was to the point of near absurdity, for such an omission in this sacred tradition would render the church nearly unidentifiable. As one elder commented almost wryly, “Well, [without missionaries] it sure wouldn’t be the LDS Church!”

Without mission, the LDS Church would not be what it is, which is to say that the church is supported by the plausibility structure of mission. Mormon mission, as a “plausibility structure” is “taken for granted as a normative feature of the Mormon community,” according to Gary Shepherd and Gordon Shepherd, sociologists of religion, and former LDS missionaries to Mexico in 1965 (1998:23). As a plausibility structure, the mission provides a framework for mobilization and collective remembrance, which among many of these missionary participants in the FFLM is handed down through the generations of families, or lineages, of returned missionaries. Mormon mission is the institutional organization and mechanism for proclaiming the gospel, inviting others into baptism in Christ. In these two ways – restoring the covenant and by making new covenants – devout Mormons avoid forgetting that they are a covenant people, which is to say they avoid God’s lamentation of Israel. And, like

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their fathers, they invite others to join them. “As our fathers believed” (Hervieu- Léger 2000:63), so too do these missionaries believe, and they act on those beliefs. In the modern world, they avoid “breaks in the chain” or what Hervieu-Léger calls modern “amnesic societies” (122-140) populated by people who have forgotten their religious traditions. The “religious act of recalling [the] past which gives meaning to the present and contains the future” (125), is the purpose of the missionary task, converting others and keeping the tradition alive.

Plausibility structures, according to Shepherd and Shepherd,

consist of integrated networks of individuals who share common assumptions, traditions, understandings, and sources of authority, which, in turn, shape their values and perceptions of reality. Plausibility structures function to inculcate and maintain adherence to a particular belief system, reinforce commitment to group norms of conduct, unifying the ranks in a common cause, and insulate against the often dispiriting antagonism and incredulity of the outside world (2001:173-174).

Handed down through the generations, the tradition of mission work seeks to restore the ancient apostolic church long ago lost to apostasy. “As long as the LDS Church seriously pursues the evangelization of the world, Mormon officials will undoubtedly continue to insist on strict orthodoxy of belief and practice” (Shepherd and Shepherd 2001:165). Only a small nucleus of orthodox believers qualifies and volunteers to carry out this mission, about one-third of all eligible LDS emerging adult men.

Mission has been of central or paradigmatic concern to Mormons since before its founding. The very missionary organization of the church, since Joseph Smith, has come under the aegis of no less than the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the highest fifteen men of the entire church. They are responsible to
see that “this gospel shall be preached unto every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (D&C 133:37). Under these General Authorities, the Missionary Executive Council directs the Missionary Department, which is responsible for general oversight of the fifteen missionary training centers and 340 missions worldwide. Collaborating together, they issue each individual missionary’s ‘call’ or calling to a specific mission based on divine revelation and what missions’ needs exist—numbers of missionaries, languages, and any visa restrictions (Britsch 2011). The Missionary Department has three primary goals: increase convert baptisms; retain new members; and “increase the number of missionaries serving” (Shepherd and Shepherd 1998:12). As these General Authorities promise the priority of mission, they admonish members to submit their lives to missionary work (Monson 2012).

Given the increasing institutional emphasis on mission, especially after World War II, recruitment success has been understood as a function of missionary numbers. For no matter the institutional “attempts to refine missionary training and increase the persuasiveness of proselyting appeals in different religious markets, the overall number of converts” depends on how many active missionaries are deployed (Shepherd and Shepherd 1996:38; Hepworth 1999). But within the past decade, missionary standards have been raised demanding of eligible emerging adults a higher bar for moral, spiritual and physical fitness to serve. Interestingly, as the number of qualified missionaries has decreased, nevertheless the ratio of converts to missionaries has increased (Appendix 3).

3 For the entire structure of the missionary program, see R. Lanier Britsch (2011). Several RM participants in this study did not attend MTCs for their training, having been among earlier missionaries first trained in the 1960s in the LTM, or Language Training Mission, prior to deployment in the field. A few participants learned language “on the job.”

4 Prophetic statements on missionaries by the Prophet and the General Authorities are often included in General Conferences, beamed around the world by satellite transmission to all members.
Table 1, letter B), which outcome is attributed by local leaders to the improvement in the collective character of missionaries pursuant to a raised bar.\(^5\)

**Raising the Bar: Qualifying for Mormon Mission**

The Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission, where approximately 130-150 young men and women proclaim the gospel, is one LDS mission in its vast global missionary complex. Working in pairs of young adult men looking uniform in white shirts and ties, and young women in modest long skirts and blouses, they proselytize sixty to seventy hours per week sharing the Book of Mormon around neighborhoods, and provide small civic services in their spare time. In 2008, thirteen percent of missionaries were women in the FFLM; by 2010 almost twenty percent were sisters. Among the missionaries serving in the FFLM, about five percent are foreign born, one of whom contributed to the focus group.\(^6\) The 130-150 missionaries serve in several languages, originating predominantly from the Mormon culture region (MCR) of the American West (Appendix C; Appendix D). First, however, they must have qualified to serve and that is a process that occupies much of Mormon family and congregational life.

To qualify – or to become what Mormons call ‘worthy’ – to serve a Mormon mission, as have these research participants, young men and women must be able to answer favorably all interview questions by their ward bishops and stake president pertaining to their religious and moral fitness. In particular, they are questioned about their faith and testimony of Jesus Christ, and truth of the church and its prophets.

\(^5\) On October 6, 2012, President Thomas S. Monson announced during the General Conference that the age of eligibility for women has been reduced from twenty-one to nineteen; men from nineteen to eighteen. This structural change will increase the numbers of missionary applications among women and men.

\(^6\) Although beyond the scope of this work, the numbers of LDS missionaries who are born abroad proselytizing for an American religion in the U. S. is an important future case study in reverse-mission.
Additionally, they must have maintained their baptismal covenants of the law of chastity, tithing, and Word of Wisdom. Finally, prospective missionaries must have faithfully attended all church meetings, remained honest in all dealings, and stayed repentant, confessing serious sin (Missionary Preparation Student Manual 2005:14). Since the bar was raised in 2002, adherence to the law of chastity, in particular, is considered non-negotiable as mentioned by several local leaders.

**Making Sacred Missionary Covenants**

“We need you to make sacred covenants,” Apostle Russell M. Ballard admonished during the General Conference, October 2002. “What we need now is the greatest generation of missionaries in the history of the Church. We need worthy, qualified, spiritually energized missionaries … ” Noting the urgency of fighting the enemy, who is “taking eternal prisoners at an alarming rate,” Apostle Ballard announced the “raising of the bar,” to field a corps more valiant for the Lord’s work. In the sternest language, he said, “the days of the “repent and go” missionary are over.” Setting forth the requirements contained in the interview, he provided young men (and women) with those simple steps they must take to qualify. Then, he reminded fathers of their sacred duty to be the best priesthood models for their sons, admonishing them for leaving that disciplinary task to local bishops. Then he turned his attention to bishops and stake presidents urging them to take over where fathers are absent in the home, and to recommend only those who in their wisest discernment are qualified. He reminded active missionaries that if they need to reevaluate their work, do so, with guidance from their mission president. And finally, Apostle Ballard turned his attention to returned

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7 This manual, produced by the Church Education System Curriculum, is used for high school Seminary and collegiate Institute preparation for all students as potential missionaries.
missionaries, “please remember that you were released from your missions but not from the Church. You spent two years as a representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. We expect you to always look and act like one of His disciples” (Ballard 2002).

In effect, the bar was raised for the entire priesthood, anyone who will serve, is serving or has ever served. One of the most important standards of the church is the law of chastity. Mormons covenant to uphold this law for which unrepentant or repeat offenders can be excommunicated, and for potential missionaries the serious violation of it means mission disqualification. But raising the bar requires a higher level of discipline, a higher bar for worthiness, and a higher level of overall fitness. An excerpt printed in Sunstone from the First Presidency’s letter to local leaders sets forth these guidelines: “fornication, heavy petting, other sexual perversions, drug abuse, serious violation of civil law, and other transgressions” require repentance for at least a year since the most recent offense; those “who have been promiscuous with several partners or who have been with one partner over an extended period of time in either a heterosexual or homosexual relationship will not be considered for full-time missionary service.” Additionally, “[m]issionary service is extremely demanding and is not suitable for persons whose physical limitations or mental or emotional disability prevents them from serving effectively.” In disqualifying cases, there are to be alternative methods of service. In this study, several leaders suggest a higher bar means, in particular, simply repenting of fornication with the expectation of serving a mission is no longer allowed.

All LDS are held to the law of chastity; “total chastity before marriage and total fidelity after [marriage] are still the standard from which there can be no deviation

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without sin, misery, and unhappiness . . . and applies not only to behavior but also to
dress, speech, and thought” (Christensen 1992:266). It is no small matter for an entire
priesthood to regulate sexual discipline across the lifespan of its members. Virginity
until marriage is one of the defining features of Mormon missionaries, and absolute
monogamy the ideal expectation of Mormon marriage for time and eternity. The status
of serving a mission is anticipated for LDS from birth, and if “returned with honor” the
missionary stands as an outward symbol of religious valiance and moral purity, ready
for adulthood.

Reference Group Theory

For Shepherd and Shepherd, Merton’s “reference group theory” best captures
how this lay religion assigns a “master status” to missionaries, making that identity the
“single most important status for defining one’s social identity, so the church can
assume priority claim on its members’ commitments and personal resources”
another seeks to emulate and imitate the model aspired to, shaping moods, motivations
and behaviors. As insiders emulating model leaders, young men socialized into the
Aaronic priesthood will look up to Melchizedek priesthood holders who look up to
missionaries who emulate the leadership of returned missionaries in local congregations
and missions. Of course, in Mormon circles, the ultimate reference group in the LDS
Church is that of the General Authorities. They provide the most public examples of
living their faith. For Mormons, to be a member of the chosen people of God is to
belong to the ultimate reference group.

The late President Gordon B. Hinckley’s exemplary legacies were considered in
the AM focus group: promoting the importance of temples and education as necessary
for eternal progress. But as a living model, his testimony, his mission service and his
temple work stood out to this group of young men. “He knew that Christ lives and
guides this church today. You cannot dispute his testimony.” Another added, “He also
believes in missionary work, being your best, he encouraged members to encourage
missionary work. And he encouraged young men to go on missions as much as he
encouraged members to help missionaries. He served a mission in Great Britain.”
Additionally, a missionary recalled a touching experience from his training in the
Missionary Training Center (MTC):

His son, Richard Hinckley of the Seventies spoke to my group like a week
before he [President Hinckley] died. He said his dad just finished some
sealings and he said that their whole family had been sealed together. His
son said that President Hinckley said that the most important thing he ever
did on this earth was to make sure his family was all sealed together in the
temple.

The exemplary significance of the Prophet’s narrative for missionaries in training
is that without missionary work, eternal temple sealings will not come to fruition for most
of humankind. The other significance point is that no matter the importance or powers
the ecclesiastical title and office their Prophet held, the single most important thing in his
life was being sealed to his family in the temple. This example of Mormon piety is
replicable by ordinary worthy Mormons. In the same way these young missionaries look
to their prophets and General Authorities as a reference group, so too do potential
converts often look to the missionaries as the reference group, worthy of spiritual and
material emulation (Lasater 2003). Stewart’s research shows that non-members most

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9 Elder focus group transcript dated April 5, 2008.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.
value an exemplary model of living among missionaries – in other words, they are to practice what they preach. When the missionaries and members provide these examples, others are more open to listening (Stewart 2007:81).

**Missionary Families and Socialization**

Most active missionaries in this study originated in families of returned missionaries whom they wanted to emulate, carrying on the Mormon family tradition of missionary service, especially by their fathers. As their fathers believed, they carry on these lineages of belief. Therefore, it is incumbent on fathers and parents primarily, and leadership second, to set a living example, and discipline youth for mission qualification. The most important institutions for keeping youngsters in the faith are the family followed by the stake organization. Holding onto the children assures the next generation of missionaries, tithers, leaders, and temple marriages, all of which revitalize and recapitulate the faith, perpetuating the chain of memory. Most importantly, keeping the family together in the covenant temporally has implications for eternal unity. Mormons have enshrined in doctrine the family-centric model uniting religion with family and morality. The family doctrines serve as an appeal to converts from fractured families where it is believed temporal and eternal families can be restored (Lasater 2003). It is primarily in the family that the next generation of missionaries is socialized.

Long before cradle Mormons become missionaries, they have generally participated in the “status sequence model” of “anticipatory socialization” (Shepherd and Shepherd 2001). Beginning at age twelve, young men advance through the Young Men’s Program and its Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods to become temple endowed for obligatory mission service. They are encouraged to save money for their missions after which the priesthood will secure their leadership in stakes, and
husbandry and fatherhood. The Young Women’s Program similarly advances girls, twelve to eighteen, through status stages, but without any of the powers of the priesthood. Instead, in anticipation of marriage and motherhood, the first page of the Young Women’s instruction manual *Personal Progress*\textsuperscript{12} workbook instructs: “God has given you special gifts and talents to help you prepare for the sacred role of motherhood” (1997:4). Rather than being encouraged by the church to save money for their own missions, it is suggested they earn and save money to donate to the ward mission fund (*Personal Progress* 1997:19). They are however, expected to provide service to others but missionary work is optional and goes without mention by the Young Women General Presidency. At age twelve, worthy boys and girls are allowed to participate in sacred temple ordinances for the dead, which inculcates at an early age the importance of Mormon lineages. Once they are in high school, LDS youth begin attending Seminary, followed by Institute at college, both of which are Church Educational System programs (CES). As instructed during missionary preparation in Seminary and Institute, LDS young adults are taught of their responsibility to fulfill the covenant of Abraham with missionary work (Missionary Preparation Student Manual).

\textsuperscript{12} A member gave me a copy of the Young Women’s manual, which is employed for girls at twelve in the Beehive cohort; at fourteen in the Mia Maid group; and at age 16 in Laurel cohort. The entire workbook is full of instructions and projects on charting family lineages and narratives, developing habits of interior religious practices, promoting service and missionary support, participating in all church activities, and age appropriate temple ordinances. It is organized around three themes, in order of age sequence, Truth (Beehives), Promise (Mia Maids), and Faith(Laurels), which is to say young girls are first taught to recognize the truth of the church through personal revelation, they make promises or covenants accordingly, and they are to endure to the end by faith. As the young women successfully work through the manual, their parents and church leaders sign off on their “personal progress.” This design suggests a program much like the Girl Scouts. Although there is no mention in the church of supporting Girl Scouts, where church approved alongside the Young Men’s program Boy Scouts is its activity arm. BSA had a prominently featured display during the 2002 grand opening of the Pembroke Pines chapel. An LDS “Friends of Scouting” pamphlet (*Scouting and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* 2008) picked up at a local ward featured quotes in support of Scouting from Presidents Hinckley and Monson. The church’s goal for the South Florida Friends of Scouting Campaign was $100,000 in 2009 solicited through private member donations beyond their ten percent tithes.
In 1976-1977, more than 97,000 LDS young adults studied at collegiate Institutes, of whom an approximate ten to twelve thousand were pre-missionaries (Britsch 1979:24). Today there are over 350,000 Institute students in over 2,500 locations.\textsuperscript{13}

Whether planning for emergent adult mission, marriage, or adulthood, Institute lessons provide valuable life instructions based on religious inspiration to manage their lives and households. At the Institute associated with Miami-Dade Community College, the Institute leader prepared a lesson on household balance sheets, showing the students how to manage a monthly budget.\textsuperscript{14} The emphasis of the lesson is on self-reliance, with budgeting worksheets to discourage incurring debts. Irrespective of which adult path they choose, young men and women are encouraged to seek personal revelation through prayer, confirming their obligation to serve, marry, and or study. Ideally, these status stages prepare the young men and women to serve missions as adults rather than as novitiates in a cultural rite of passage. While both men and women proselytize, or teach, only men are ordained in the Melchizedek priesthood necessary to confer the ordinance of baptism on new members.

In the event a new convert wants to serve a mission, an area mission official instructed, “A young person must be a member of the Church for at least one year before he or she can serve a mission.” During this year they are instructed in Mormon Sunday School lessons, along with new investigators and reactivating members (typically brought to services by the missionaries), from the text, Gospel Principles


\textsuperscript{14} Field notes dated June 26, 2008.
Students are reassured that Mormons are “the Lord’s covenant people” and their “fulness of the gospel is the new and everlasting covenant” (Chapter 15, Gospel Principles 2009:85) in a direct line from Abraham through Ephraim, the lineage responsible for missionary work. Once converts have studied for a year, they can submit their mission applications, “so long as their date of entry into the Missionary Training Center is at least one year after their baptism.” If a young man converts after age twenty-five he can still serve a mission if he has been in the church one year and “if the area office receives his application [up to] the day before his twenty-sixth birthday, he is good to go. But if he has already had his twenty-sixth birthday, he cannot serve until he serves a senior mission with his spouse.”

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The entire socialization process is for the purpose of perpetuating the next generation of missionaries who are more likely to become active members, marry and parent in the faith, carrying on the family mission lineages. Still, only about fifty-nine percent of baptized males in the U. S. receive the Melchizedek priesthood (Bushman 2006:72) and only about one-third of eligible aged men serve missions. According to the 2011 National Survey of Mormons in the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, thirty-one percent of men and women raised Mormon have served missions; and forty-three percent of LDS men (cradle and convert) and eleven percent of women have served full-time missions (Mormons in America 2012). Although these newer statistics suggest that the number of men serving has increased since 2001, the participants in

15 Email correspondence with a mission area secretary and his wife dated February 28, 2012, in possession of the author.
this study nevertheless come from a very select group of eligible Mormon emerging adults – those who choose to be chosen.

Embodying the necessary discipline to serve a mission might seem like a constraint on freedom, but for many Mormons, that capacity to exercise agency in a life of self-discipline that yields all the privileges of the faith is the ultimate freedom. Mormons work diligently to keep themselves and their youngsters morally pure, practicing a high degree of religiosity so that they qualify for missions during a stage in life and in the life of the nation when many American youth lose their religion (Religion among the Millennials 2010). ¹⁶

Widely circulated among Mormons is research of its young men (Duke 1998:5), the results of which are compiled and published in the popular LDS magazine Ensign (Key to Strong Young Men 1984).¹⁷ The best predictor of mission service is for young men “born in the covenant or later sealed to their parents [in temple covenants].” They are “most likely to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood, go on a mission, and marry in the temple.” The second study, a random sample, concluded that congruence with parents and home religious activity were the best indicators for missions and temple

¹⁶ LDS missionaries come from the emerging adult population, or Millennials, age 18-29. A survey by Pew Forum demonstrates that Millennials have the highest percentage of unaffiliated Americans at 25 percent. Putnam and Campbell (2010) attribute this religious attrition, based on the Faith Matters Survey of 2006, to a discomfort for young adults in the high correlation between the Republican Party and conservative religion. “If religion equals Republican, then they have decided that religion is not for them” (2010:3). However, another longitudinal study of a sample of emerging adults shows that the LDS have the highest retention rate (Smith and Snell 2009:109 based on Smith and Denton 2005). If so, Mormon emerging adults would likely not be discomforted by the association of conservative religion and the G.O.P. since LDS of all ages are disproportionately Republican (74 percent compared to the U.S. general public 45 percent). Of those reporting party affiliation in this study, where I met one Democrat and the balance are Republican. See also Mormons in America (2012).

¹⁷ This study was called to my attention by numerous leaders and given to me by a mission president.
marriage. Various studies on LDS family life show high rates of family religious cohesion or congruency among Latter-day Saints.\textsuperscript{18}

The most recent studies of emerging adults demonstrate higher family religiosity and congruence between Mormon parents and their children exceeding all other religions studied (Smith and Snell 2009:128 based on Smith and Denton 2005:35-36). Prompted by the fact that two-thirds of Mormon men do not serve mission, the most comprehensive recent study of LDS returned missionaries compared to non-missionary men show higher rates of personal and family religiosity by every indicator among returned missionaries (Chadwick, Top and McClendon 2010:52-61; 247-264; 265-320). These researchers had anticipated that the non-missionary men they studied would have met an LDS woman and married in the temple anyway. “Such was not the case. Once these young men dropped out, many while still in Primary, they became alienated from the Church with little prospect of return” (2010:344). Why these men dropped out, the study doesn’t say. But if they left while still in Primary, it suggests an absence of parental religiosity and or influence. If parents practice their religion and hold their children to the same level of engagement, the retention and religiosity of the next generation is demonstrably better. But there appears to be little movement in the overall numbers of men who serve missions, still around thirty percent since the early 1980s. There appears to be a gap in these family studies none of which demonstrate

\textsuperscript{18} For numerous scholarly studies on several dimensions of contemporary Mormon family life and religiosity see Chadwick, Top and McClendon (2010) specifically Appendix C for a bibliography on scholarship related to their cumulative 17 years of quantitative study on LDS families; additionally, there are chapters in Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham, and Pitcher (1998); Cornwall, Heaton, and Young (2001); Duke (1998); and Heaton, Bahr and Jacobson (2004a; 2004b). For specific chapters on Mormon family life, see Bahr (2001); Bushman (2006); Givens (2004); Heaton and Goodman (1985).
lineages of mission service in families, which may be the key to keeping children in the faith – serving missions in family traditions of missionary service.

Latter-day Saints know that the single most important location for socializing Mormon missionary culture in the next generation is in the intact faithful family of origin. But beyond high family religious congruency, most of these missionaries have also benefitted from a strong missionary family tradition, which embodies lineages of belief where the missionary obligation and privilege is handed down through the generations in one of the most honorable callings of all. Where their parents, siblings and other returned missionaries have served as positive reference groups for these young men and women, so too, will they serve as the next generation of missionaries to emulate. Further, these elders and sisters have demonstrated by their selection as missionaries that they have maintained moral purity and high degrees of activity. Finally, they know that they are keeping and making sacred covenants as the only qualified people on earth chosen to proclaim the gospel, inviting all people to come unto Christ in these last days. Sacrificing much and living a highly disciplined, committed and austere religious life provides an obvious model to potential converts, of whom many of the same requirements will be expected. To whom much is given, much is expected.

**Predisposition: Becoming a Missionary**

**Family Missionary Lineages**

These young missionaries have, like Paul, traveled at great distances and are quintessential witnesses of the message of Jesus Christ. They embody the necessary self-discipline and skills to serve, and are working tirelessly toward the goal of providing eternal salvation to all of humankind. These eighteen missionaries, proclaiming the gospel in a mission that is somewhat “foreign” to them, provide a closer glimpse into
how mission works to restore the sacred covenant and perpetuate the chain of memory. Twelve of the men work the northerly Fort Lauderdale areas of the mission; two men and four women were from the southerly Miami areas; with seven serving Spanish assignments and eleven working in English. Of eighteen participants, sixteen were born into active LDS families who were very supportive of their missions, including reported spiritual, emotional and financial support to the tune of approximately $10,000 per two year mission, self or family funded. One young man was born LDS to inactive parents but his grandmother was supportive; and another converted to the church at age sixteen. Fourteen came from families with a missionary tradition; thirteen missionaries had parents who served, including twelve fathers and two mothers. Seven grandfathers served missions; one grandmother served in Tokyo, as did her daughter, one of two mothers. Eight missionaries had sixteen brothers (six in one family, four in another) and five sisters (three in one family) who did missionary work; only one reported a brother who didn’t serve. One woman’s great grandparents converted in Florida in 1875, which made her mission in Florida even more meaningful.

Returned and active family missionaries were reported to have provided a positive role model, much as a “reference group.” Having already served successfully, these family members encouraged their grandchildren, sons and daughters and siblings to do the same, reinforcing the tradition to serve. In other words, to go and make disciples for Jesus Christ, one must be a disciple for Jesus Christ, disciplined by religious tradition and family to serve missions. In total, these sixteen families supported sixty-one reported missions going back to the grandparent generation. Half of these informants discussed the importance of family members in their decisions to go
on a mission; one man in particular noted seeing “the change in my bro and I really wanted [that].”\textsuperscript{19} One sister spoke of her mother’s service: “My mom used to talk about her Tokyo mission. I looked at her pictures. I wanted to experience a different part of the world.”\textsuperscript{20} Another sister shared about her family, “They have always loved missionary work and were thrilled I chose to serve.”\textsuperscript{21} Three others reported having admired missionaries who had served, and were encouraged by church leaders. This level of familial and institutional missionary commitment may be in part a function of the fact that most missionaries originated in the MCR of the American West where the church enjoys great influence. But of the four missionaries who are the very first to serve in their families, three were also from the MCR where the tradition and lineages comprise the cultural region.

These young men and women have traveled great distances from home to serve a mission, having sacrificed much in their former lives to do so. Among the eighteen participants, thirteen missionaries were born in the MCR; one elder was born in Mexico City and lived most recently in Salt Lake City, and was the only Hispanic active missionary to participate in this part of the research. Many of the missionaries shared the most difficult part of serving a mission is missing their homes, families, and friends. Homesickness is not unusual since there are only two phone calls per year allowed, one on Christmas and one on Mother’s Day. One sister said that email misunderstandings with parents were very hard since there is no calling to clear it up\textsuperscript{22} and email was

\textsuperscript{19} Questionnaire Elder Y. dated April 5, 2008.
\textsuperscript{20} Sister focus group transcript dated June 28, 2008.
\textsuperscript{21} Questionnaire Sister H. dated June 28, 2008.
\textsuperscript{22} Sister focus group transcript dated June 28, 2008.
typically very limited to their preparation day, the one day off per week when they take care of all their personal shopping, laundry, and other needs. Three missionaries missed sleep the most. One young man new to the mission reported the hardest thing for him was giving up music, and his girlfriend, and selling belongings to help fund his mission. All of these sacrifices, only to be rejected by people who won’t listen, is another source of mission hardship. Sacrifice is nevertheless an expected theme of mission. As in the missionary example of Paul, the very obligation to share the gospel requires sacrifice.

**Missionary Motivations**

Serving a mission is a calling, on the order of Paul’s calling, which all Christians admittedly assume as their missionary model. The Pauline paradigm provides the baseline of all Christian mission enterprises, including the Enlightenment paradigm, which informed “the entire Western missionary movement of the past three centuries” (Bosch 2005:344). Both of these paradigms similarly inform Mormon mission. While the features of these two Christian mission paradigms provide a better understanding of Mormon mission, Mormons take apostolic Christianity as their model of ecclesiastical foundation, and reject post-apostolic Christianity as apostate. But because the American Second Great Awakening was the social location of their emergence, Mormons demonstrate some features with modern Protestant mission.

The three major motivations of the apostolic mission are found in Paul, which these Mormons exemplify as evidenced by their narratives. For Bosch, the “purpose of Paul’s mission, then, is to lead people to salvation in Christ” and prepare the world for

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23 Questionnaire Elder N. dated April 5, 2008.
his imminent second coming (2005:135). First, Paul’s urgent sense of concern for bringing all into the exemplary community of believers included gentiles in a pagan world; this was the purpose of Christ’s saving work as an expression of God’s will for all humans. Latter-day Saints likewise labor out of concern for God’s will. Seven missionaries shared the sense of concern for others, inviting all to come unto Christ, as following God’s will or command. For one young man, his motivation was “I feel like I should bring people to Christ, who haven’t known the truth.”24 Concerns for others were phrased including the simple reason of “helping people” and for one sister, “[serving a mission] would be a chance to show people they are loved by a Father in Heaven.”25 Another elder showed concern for the will of God: “to share the happiness I have and it’s a commandment of God.”26

Second, Paul felt a reciprocal sense of responsibility or indebtedness to share the gift of salvation he was freely given. Like Paul, Mormons often feel this sense of obligatory sharing because they understand they have been given the only truth on earth. This responsibility or obligation to reciprocate was articulated by six participants, including “to share what has blessed me and my family;”27 “to share the gospel with those I would meet.”28 One elder expressed a personal exchange or deal with God: “Because God forgives my sins and I promised him that if everything will be ok, I’ll share

24 Questionnaire Elder N. dated April 5, 2008.
26 Questionnaire Elder MR. dated April 5, 2008.
27 Questionnaire Elder W. dated April 5, 2008.
28 Questionnaire Elder ER. dated April 5, 2008.
the gospel."\(^{29}\) Two young men suggest reciprocity and gratitude or love: “because [serving a mission] is the best to show my faithfulness and return in a small part what I have been given;"\(^{30}\) and “to share something that has changed my life and show love to the Lord."\(^{31}\)

Third, Paul felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude or privilege having experienced the outpouring of God’s love through Jesus Christ (Bosch 2005: 133-139), which Mormons demonstrate, as already mentioned. Although these are not discreet categories of motivation and overlap to some degree they resonate in the missionaries’ narratives as shown above. But apostolic motivations are not the only reasons for contemporary service, as shown in some very simple, concise and pragmatic ways.

Several of these missionaries articulate Enlightenment motifs. Leaving aside until a later study the emergent fallacies of western thought that have long troubled Christian mission along fault lines of culture, ideology, and hegemony (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:19-27), Mormons make no particular use of any mission theory and go about their work very pragmatically (Britsch 1979) as a heavenly and prophetic mandate in these latter-days. The Enlightenment “age of reason” yields categorizations of subject-object, cause and effect, and supposed ‘value-neutral’ thinking that can solve all problems. With an emphasis on human progress, modernization became the normative social process supplying a creed of faith in humanity. The Enlightenment assumed humans to be autonomous, rational human subjects made in God’s image, valorizing God’s glory in the love and compassion of Jesus as biblical motifs. Accordingly, issues of

\(^{29}\) Questionnaire Elder A. dated April 5, 2008.

\(^{30}\) Questionnaire Elder K. dated April 5, 2008.

\(^{31}\) Questionnaire Elder G. dated April 5, 2008.
enculturation, manifest destiny and colonialism all emerged from the urgency, volunterism, and pragmatism of objective thinking in the Enlightenment paradigm.

Some missionary motivations comport favorably with these Enlightenment motifs, and were very simply, rationally expressed. Four participants expressed simply that serving a mission was “the right thing to do” which could be interpreted as a rational choice. The “right thing to do” could also include the right concern for others, the correct responsibility to share, or as a right expression of love if elaborated. Another elder said that “I know that this is the Lord’s work and this is where He wants me to be” suggesting the manifest destiny of Mormon mission that has often been repeated by its prophets and General Authorities.

All potential missionaries are encouraged to seek confirmation by the Holy Ghost through personal revelation unique to the Mormons, validating their missions. Several expressed this specific Mormon approach: “I prayed to the Lord to see if this is what I am supposed to do;” and “because I knew it was what God wanted me to do.” One elder’s motivations were very particular to Mormonism: “I gained a testimony of the Church through the Book of Mormon and then prayed and had good peer support.”

For the LDS women, serving a mission is not obligatory and is not expected. One woman discussed uncertainty and ambivalence about deciding to serve, problems that LDS men do not generally encounter given the obligation and certitude of service.

32 Questionnaire Elder H. dated April 5, 2008.
33 Questionnaire Elder JR. dated April 5, 2008.
34 Questionnaire Elder M. dated April 5, 2008.
35 Questionnaire Elder D. dated April 5, 2008.
But, in her uncertainty, she relied on the LDS method for validation—personal revelation through prayer. She commented:

I couldn’t figure out what I was supposed to do. Then in the first year of college, my prayers were answered that I should go. Then it changed for a couple of years as I approached twenty-one, but it was still an option. Then I graduated. Something needed to happen, something needed to change – what should I do? I had to decide that I needed to go on a mission for the right reason – to help people. Once I knew I wanted to serve for that reason, I made the decision to go.36

The two women discussed a very contemporary motivation for mission service: wanting to experience the world through serving a mission. One sister wanted the adventure available to an LDS woman, confirmed by personal revelation:

I’ve learned so much about the organization of the church and women serving in the minority. There are probably hundreds of differing views held by elders on the role of women [in mission]. We are thought to be more spiritual and like perfect. Because there was not the expectation that women are supposed to serve, we are free to make that choice. I wanted to, but didn’t have to. I decided at eighteen, in an epiphany moment.”37

Another woman wanted the world experience her mother had had in Tokyo as a missionary. One sister cared to help people, but her first concern was the obligation to her own family tradition in which others had served; “There was a strong tradition in my family and I wanted that ever since I was fourteen. My life wouldn’t be complete if I didn’t serve. I wanted the joy of helping people.”38 In all cases, that they submitted to their church’s particular mission call rather than joining the Peace Corps says something for the power of the insider reference group, or master status as a Mormon missionary in a family tradition. Finally, in the Mormon mission tradition, of the fourteen

36 Sister focus group transcript dated June 28, 2008.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
born into missionary families, all of them expressed family support, encouragement and influence on their decisions to serve, along with some sharing the favorable role of friends, church leaders, and other returned missionaries.

These missionaries’ narratives demonstrate their family missionary backgrounds where lineages of service provided a reference group model of the covenant people. Through rational revelation they found confirmation of their service, motivated by Pauline and Enlightenment characteristics. Along with their spiritual motivations, the backgrounds of these young adults ultimately predisposed most of them for serving a mission. The importance of family religiosity cannot be overstated for keeping youngsters in the faith and qualified for missions. But still, nearly two-thirds of men do not serve and their rates of retention and religiosity are demonstrably less robust than their returned missionary contemporaries. The family tradition of mission service may well provide the additional incentive to revitalize the faith, retain its members, and perpetuate the lineages of belief in chains of memory. If the church wants to increase the rates of member missionary service and member retention, it should send more women on missions. Given the studies on family religious coherence, a child growing up in a two parent RM home would have a higher likelihood of staying in the faith and perpetuating the missionary church.

Serving a mission provides the important status and identity in the LDS community that is held in high esteem for adulthood in the church. For many of the participants, the idea of serving a mission was largely understood as a “given”—or a norm, a plausibility structure, to be expected of the men, and an opportunity for the women. Further, they have displayed the requisite preparedness and discipline to
serve, and they have committed to worthiness from a young age. This is to say, they have begun the process of perfecting the saints at an early age through their families and stakes. That their service would require much discipline and sacrifice, including financial, was never expressed as anything but completely reasonable and rational, however mostly understated. Therefore, it is quite easy to say their decisions to serve were entirely rational choices, but there is no hint of any economic calculus involved; if anything, the financial costs would mitigate against serving. At $10,000 per mission some of these families have sacrificed much to support five or six children in mission. But for Mormons, the benefits far outweigh the costs, even if to outsiders or non-supporters the decisions appear anything but economically rational. Ultimately, serving a mission reinforces the notion of ‘keeping an eternal perspective’ as Mormons are inclined to say.

Missionaries and their families submit their lives in service to go wherever they are called as part of the cosmic eschatological vision of the LDS Church expanding to the ends of the earth and beyond. By restoring the sacred covenant, the global members join this church to make and keep covenants, perpetuating the faith in lineages of belief and service. President Gordon B. Hinckley is quoted reminding them that everyone came into the church through missionaries:

> Is not this the story of missionary work? He who goes forth as a servant of the Lord saves himself. He grows in faith. He grows in capacity. He grows in understanding. He grows in love for the Lord. He likewise blesses those who hear him. Every person in this Church, with rare exception, is a member because of missionaries who either taught him or taught his forbearers. Every person could stand and bear testimony and express appreciation for those who were the means of bringing to him or his forbearers this work of salvation and eternal life.\(^{39}\)

\(^{39}\) “Why Does the Mormon Church Send out Missionaries?”
Joseph Smith prophesied nearly 200 years ago the manifest destiny of this missionary work: "The truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done." Having considered the background for missionary service and the predisposing conditions for accepting the calling, Chapter 7 considers the participant missionaries' active field experience. The participants in this study desire, and feel obligated, to be a link in the chain of memory in the tradition of their fathers, which provides purpose and meaning in their lives as a sacred canopy of belonging and protection. Having received their temple endowments, these young men and women were fully immersed in the Missionary Training Center (MTC) in Provo, Utah, where they learned how to become missionaries. From there they were dispatched to the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission.

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CHAPTER 8
ACTIVE MISSIONARIES PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL

Newly called missionaries are ‘set apart’ or commissioned as was Paul, for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel, or what Mormons call ‘inviting all to come unto Christ.’ They understand they have been called by the very First Presidency and the Prophet of God; they have undergone spiritual and moral scrutiny in interviews by their bishops and stake presidents back home. As discussed in the prior chapter on missionary background and predisposing conditions, many were endowed into “lineages of belief” by their families of origin in the missionary tradition. Endowed in the temple with the spiritual gifts necessary to serve, they come to the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission prepared to sacrifice up to two years of young adulthood in what one mission president’s wife calls “their ten percent tithe on the first twenty years of their lives.”

In addition to the service of eighteen missionary participants, this chapter includes the work of two mission presidents and wives, and two ward mission leaders (one a past mission president counselor) to contribute to an understanding of the FFLM and to the development of deep lineages of belief enacted in missionary service. Of these four mission officials, two were born into the MCR and two were converts from the Hispanic Caribbean; three are married with two families of children who served missions. Of the four, three served in Latin America and the fourth converted at an age beyond service. One mission president’s family included mission service by him and his four brothers. His wife’s family is in the Hyrum (Joseph’s brother) Smith lineage and all nine siblings served missions. This couple’s ten of eleven children served, as have seven children in-law. Demonstrated in the missionary piety of these family lineages it

1 Field notes, dated February 19, 2008.
is prerequisite that all of these members have made and kept their baptismal, priesthood, and temple covenants. Multiple interviews of mission leaders were shared at the mission home, attending General Conferences together, in their homes over meals with family members, and conducted at their business offices. All of these mission officials and their wives serve as a powerful reference group, whom these missionaries deeply admire and hope to emulate as adults in the church.

This chapter considers the missionary participants’ active service in the FFLM following the MTC, where these missionaries make the necessary contact with potential converts. In the mission they grapple with the challenges of finding receptive investigators, assessing appeals of conversion as messengers with a particular but universal message. They experience rejection and success as they invite families into conversion, with its costs and benefits. These young men and women, so very assured, confront the thorny and ambiguous issue of culture, with its potential for transformation. Finally, they assess growth and retention, what methods work for generating better referrals. Ultimately, they invite all to come unto Christ, baptizing them in the covenant, and shepherding them to their new ward and stake communities. Accepting baptism means crossing a religious boundary into a potentially new “master status” with specific parameters for belonging through belief and behavior. As the missionaries ask others to change their lives, they too, are changed by the mission experience.

**The Field Experience**

**The Missionary Training Center**

The first stop is to the Missionary Training Center, or MTC, in Provo, Utah, the church’s oldest and most comprehensive training site, recently expanded to include online missionaries. One of fifteen around the world, MTCs are located in the proximity
of temples so that missionaries have access to temple rites in preparation for their missions (Shepherd and Shepherd 1998:54). After a short welcome and orientation film, there are hugs and kisses goodbye, exiting through two doorways where MTC workers stand ready with tissues: one door for missionaries, the other for family. Here they are paired with their first companion, from whom they will not be separated other than for hygiene and sleeping (Embry 1998:179). The most notable first impression of the MTC is the immersion in discipline, a “cloistered environment” or “total institution” fashioned on the surveillance of a military model (Shepherd and Shepherd 1998:55).

The recurring term discipline is applicable in its several meanings to life in the mission for the missionary beginning at the MTC. They will learn and transmit a “body of knowledge” in the teachings of the church conveyed through Preach My Gospel. They undertake a disciplinary military-style method of training (Peterson 2003:42; Shepherd and Shepherd 1998:56) first implemented in the MTC and followed by mission rules for maintaining obedience. Third, missionaries are responsible for the necessary self-discipline of a spiritual mind and body. Returned missionary John Bytheway instructs missionaries, “Weak discipline makes weak missionaries. The word discipline sounds a lot like the word disciple. Being a disciple means being disciplined. On a mission you will have to discipline your eyes, your tongue, your mind, your whole body” (1996:8). Reminding missionaries that their bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost, President Packer reminds youngsters at a CES Fireside broadcast worldwide, “Your body really is the instrument of your mind and the foundation of your character” (2003).
Although rarely necessary according to mission officials, missionaries are subject to sanction, punishment, or early return home. Aside from disciplinary issues, some missionaries are just not up to the rigors of service, physically, mentally, or emotionally. In any case, the goal for all missionaries is to “return with honor.” In the inverse, “aborted missions seem worse” than not having served at all (Peterson 2003:43).

Despite these rigorous demands and the “guilt screw that is tightened down at the MTC” (Peterson 2003:42), some ninety-five percent of the all-volunteer missionary corps completes their MTC training with honor (Shepherd and Shepherd 1998:57).

The MTC is a defining moment for many missionaries, the moment when they face their fears, generally through prayer. One sister, very new to the mission, commented on her difficulties at the MTC learning American Sign Language but how sticking it out had already changed her life:

Let me talk about the MTC experience. I did not want to learn ASL because I am hard of hearing myself. I hit a wall at the MTC. I had one deaf companion, one hearing companion, and I was in between, hard of hearing. I felt like I wasn’t part of the hearing world and not part of the deaf world. ASL is not a real language or culture. So, one night I realized I just need to get out of my shell and step up. Through the MTC and learning ASL, it changed my whole perspective, opened up a whole new world for me.2

The “MTC is no ordinary school but a sacred place, detached from the mundane concerns of the profane world—a place where their diligent obedience will put them in constant contact with the spirit of God” (Shepherd and Shepherd 1998:51), which most missionaries feel is an absolute necessity to conduct a mission. Not only will the spirit guide their missionary activities, but the spirit will also make their acquisition of necessary knowledge and language more proficient if they apply themselves. If training

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2 Sister focus group transcript dated June 28, 2008
in a language the typical duration in the MTC is eight to twelve weeks; if serving in English, typically three or four weeks. Successful training in the MTC is a total immersion in the doctrines, the teachings, communication, and effective proselytizing methods to be employed in the mission field.

**Serving in the FFLM**

New missionaries arriving at the FFLM are welcomed by the mission president and wife in what is called a “companion calling” serving as the missionaries’ surrogate father and mother in mission. The father is the mentor, commander in chief and chief disciplinary officer while the mother takes care of illnesses and meals, and the more nurturing side of mission. Every six weeks in the mission there are transfers of incoming and outgoing missionaries, requiring a re-shuffle of personnel in zones and districts. The president is served by two or three young men in the mission home’s administrative office, a position of significant distinction; two other elders conduct missionary logistics such as cars and apartments. Other leadership assignments are made in zones and districts. Each new missionary is assigned as a ‘junior’ to a ‘senior’ companion who provides brotherly (or sisterly) mentoring with experience in the missionary system and in the mission field.

Arriving in the greater Fort Lauderdale-Miami area, which is a very cosmopolitan, multi-cultural, and socioeconomically stratified place, with a high percentage of Latinos, there is what some call “culture shock” for missionaries (Peterson 2003:42), who are disproportionately Anglo Americans from a more sheltered Mormon culture region. One ward mission leader said that the FFLM is demographically and geographically unique,
experiencing much transience in membership due to economic challenges. Particularly shocking to these new missionaries are the unexpected numbers of people cohabitating, which for some would prove to be a conversion impediment. There were unexpected difficulties accessing people living in gated communities, who by missionary reckonings are wealthy and successful—probably not good candidates for changing their lives. Conversely, among the poor availability is difficult due to working conditions, even though the poor are usually considered the most receptive because “they are humble” and they are looking for ways “to improve their lives.” One elder added, “They come here from Latin [American] culture and they work every day, they come for economic advantages. So, keeping the Sabbath, that is a big obstacle” especially when they attempt to reach the male heads of household. Overall, missionary success rates are higher if the men are involved despite the fact that women and children are initially more interested.

**Investigators and Appeals**

“Finding the elect” (Bishop 1982:2) and finding what appeals to them are the necessary elements in proselytizing. In *Preach My Gospel* (2004), missionaries are instructed: “You are to build up the Church by finding “them that will receive you” (D&C 42:8). Such people will recognize that you are the Lord’s servants. They will be willing to act on your message. Many of these people have been “kept from the truth [only] because they know not where to find it” (D&C 123:12)” (*Preach My Gospel* 2004:156).

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3 Transcript dated June 27, 2008 with ward mission leader who served a mission in Mexico City, 1998-2000. For local congregations and their leadership the challenges of migration – both in and out – was concurred by the mission president, field notes February 19, 2008.

4 Mentioned in the focus group; and by the mission president, field notes February 27, 2008, who discussed that there is no baptism for cohabiting couples. If they live separately, repent sufficiently, and then desire baptism, it will granted.
For one missionary, the elect are not easy to find, but are the most receptive, thought to be predisposed to hearing the message. In the FFLM where so many people are from Latin America, those who are receptive are for another elder the “fulfillment of prophecy” eluding to the establishment of the kingdom of God in the Americas. Sometimes missionaries refer to the most receptive people as ‘golden investigators.’ They are typically warm, open, are ready and willing to change. When that ‘moment of truth’ arrives in the conversion process one sister described “the light in their eyes of the Holy Ghost.” Seven missionaries expressed specifically the role of the Holy Ghost as an irresistible appeal presented by the missionaries to amenable investigators.\(^5\) Where a simple expression of belief is sufficient for conversion in some religions, the Mormons insist that belief is important but must be accompanied by a revelatory verification of the truth solicited through prayer. Only through the testimony is the investigator assured of an authentic conversion through the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost however, must first be present in the work and intentions of the missionaries, who ‘teach by the spirit.’ According to one elder, “They can feel the way we feel when we teach the gospel. Ya know, the way they feel, that feeling of peace, joy, comfort, that there really is someone above us, our Heavenly Father, who loves each one of us. That's something that a lot of people don't feel.”\(^6\) Belonging in the covenant offers that opportunity for communion with the godhead and the community. “We give them the taste of the Holy Ghost—once they feel the Holy Ghost—we ask them to read the scriptures, to question everything we say, to find out for themselves if it

\(^5\) Elder focus group transcript, April 5, 2008.

\(^6\) Ibid.
is true or not, that feels good when they search, so that they can make covenants with the Holy Ghost."\(^7\)

Contrasted with a small sample of converts from Latin America, and in Santo Domingo, DR, the role of the Holy Ghost as a personal testimony was present in twenty-three of thirty-six converts or sixty-four percent, although the church instructs missionaries that the testimony is a necessary condition for baptism (Lasater 2003:151). As the church has struggled with retentions, the role of the Holy Ghost has been increasingly emphasized, both in missionary teaching methods and in receipt of a personal testimony by investigators.

Another elder discussed the unique LDS appeal of the original priesthood restored, found only in this church.

You can’t have salvation without the priesthood, and that’s something that just this church holds. Through the priesthood we have continuing revelation. We have a prophet on the earth today who can speak with God so we can know exactly what we need to know in order to overcome the difficulties that we face in this time. It doesn’t make sense to deal with only the revelations that were given to Moses at that time. It doesn’t fit our time. We have a prophet on the earth today who can receive revelation to overcome problems like porn, gangs, and all the problems we face in this day and age.\(^8\)

Additionally, other particular LDS appeals are family-centric doctrines. Quoting one missionary, “they like the idea of the eternal family and being accepted into a group of a people. They may not have a great family and this [church] can offer a family relationship.” Through their eternal families, “baptisms for the dead” are unique to this church where “everyone will have a chance to come into the kingdom.”\(^9\)

\(^7\) Elder focus group transcript dated April 5, 2008.
\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Ibid.
centric doctrines were of primary appeal to one-third of the 2003 participants (Jarvis 2000; Lasater 2003:128).

**Messengers and Messages**

Rejection and resistance may also be based on responses to the messengers or the message. Rejection is a constant possibility, and summoning the courage to share the gospel with total strangers is no small challenge in its own right, expressed by half these missionaries. Especially where recruitment is dependent upon working streets and cold calling neighborhoods, they share spaces with Jehovah’s Witnesses, which sixteen of these missionaries mentioned as the other group proselytizing this area. Jehovah’s Witnesses are notorious for wanting to stage public theological debates, which the missionaries are taught to politely decline, avoiding any and all contention. Avoiding spectacle competition, these missionaries attempt to differentiate themselves from other proselytizers. But there remain suspicions of the messengers, who in the initial perception may serve the opposite of the reference group.

For some the shirt and tie [is a problem]. I feel like we’d be more successful if we could just wear regular clothes. They associate the tie and shirt with religion and there’s a wall. They don’t want to talk about religion. A lot of times, people in Homestead were afraid we were immigration, or something official. But on the other hand, we’re representing the Lord, so we need to look the part.\(^\text{10}\)

There is a hint of self-consciousness in his remarks and it is the case that throughout the study, missionaries often mention that because of their attire they are mistaken for salesmen and government agents. Elders worldwide wear the shirt and tie, which is to say they follow the rules and have rationalized that God wants them to dress in American business style. Sisters however, are thought to be less threatening.

\(^{10}\) Focus group transcript dated April 5, 2008.
Therefore, access can be often be promoted by the women, which was concurred by all the elders, although there are no studies that indeed women are more successful (Embry 1998:181). One elder mentioned, “Sometimes people are less threatened by a sister; two 6’3” elders show up, they can throw up a wall, so the sisters are less threatening.” One young woman agreed that women can get access where men often cannot; men are not to approach or teach single women alone. She also discussed the assumptions about women; “women are more approachable, even if at times it might be the reverse, where they can get in and the men cannot. We’re more nurturing, organized, teach with pretty pictures, lovey-dovey, and one man told me that we were more respected than the elders.” Her companion added, “Oh, yes, an elder told me that girls like flowers, as a sign of being more empathetic.” The women and men in this study do not view themselves as instrumental in conversion. They only see themselves as teachers because they say it is not they who convert an investigator – it is the Holy Ghost who converts investigators. However, among the participants in the 2003 study, seventy-three percent attributed their conversions to the role of missionaries (forty-two percent) and members (thirty-one percent), which is suggestive of reference group attribution (Lasater 2003:130). Although women and men are both teachers, only the men can confer baptism through the proper priesthood authority restored.

Even if the messengers are received, sometimes it is the message itself that is ill appreciated. For some it is the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s story. And

11 Elder focus group transcript dated April 5, 2008.
12 Sister focus group transcript dated June 28, 2008.
13 Ibid.
repeatedly, the demands of the church are rejected. For some it is resistance to changing their lives, paying a ten percent tithe, and keeping all the covenants. In particular, an obstacle repeatedly mentioned is to give up those prohibitions in the Word of Wisdom: alcohol, drugs, smoking. There can be considerable resistance to changing old habits, and making “big lifestyle changes.” In other words, many people resist the notion of making the missionaries their reference group, rejecting the message and discerning the demands that the church will require. Additionally, many are reluctant to change their affiliations however tenuous they might be, or however loosely identified with another tradition.

From time to time, an investigator goes from receptive to no longer interested without any indication if the problem was the message, the messenger or something else. Several missionaries described that as one of the most difficult things about their missions. “Dealing with peoples’ agency – it’s not up to me if people change; it is up to them” one missionary shared, and another, “the disappointment that comes when people don’t choose to repent” or people are “so hard they won’t listen at all.” But these elders and sisters realize they are asking people to make sweeping changes in their lives, changes that are not easily made. Ultimately, the missionaries are asking potential converts to cross a religious boundary into a new master status of identity, again, often breaking with their families of origin.

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14 Sister focus group transcript dated June 28, 2008
Families and Conversions: Costs and Benefits

As expected, most of the potential pool of investigators are Catholic, “by family tradition only” as one missionary put it.\textsuperscript{15} Others encountered are Baptists, Jews, non-denominational and Protestants, evangelicals, and more Catholics. Jews and evangelicals are the least receptive, but many Catholics are too despite the fact that the majority of conversions come from a largely Catholic region. As one missionary said, “It is their tradition, religious tradition of the forefathers. My parents are Catholic and it’s good enough for them, my grandparents are Catholic and its good enough for them, my great grandparents are Catholic and it’s good enough for them. It’s obviously good enough for me. So family ties are important also.”\textsuperscript{16}

One sister shared empathy for the investigator’s relationship to the family of origin as a downside of joining: “Not having support from family or friends, may feel like there is so much to learn and do that it is so foreign to their normal lifestyle.”\textsuperscript{17} In total, only two missionaries gave expression to the importance of the investigator’s family ties, whether as an obstacle to joining (one said about Catholics that their “family ties are important” to them), as a downside once converted and as a mechanism against retention. Given these three opportunities to discuss the importance of investigator families, it was surprising to encounter so little discussion, especially as important to these missionaries as their families are. Inversely, it may be a general missionary perception that investigators’ nominal Catholic family ties are less binding than religious Mormon family ties, and that breaking nominal religious ties will ultimately be to the new

\textsuperscript{15} Elder focus group transcript dated April 5, 2008.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Sister focus group transcript dated June 28, 2008.
members’ advantage, where potentially he or she may also serve as an exemplary model for the family of origin. But if due to conversion family conflict remains and the new convert later falls away, real harm may have been done.

In missionary circles there is the acknowledgement that recruitment as much as possible must include the men as well as women and children. Priesthood holders are necessary to the building of stakes and to the eternal progress of their families, and yet men are often the holdouts in recruitment and joining (Stewart 2007:415-423; Shepherd and Shepherd 1998:98). Missionaries are instructed, “Strive to find and teach families—a father, mother, and children—who can support one another in living the gospel and eventually be sealed as a family unit by restored priesthood authority” (Preach My Gospel 2004:3). Nevertheless, in the interim the breaking of family ties is no small matter. While the church is a family church, encouraging family conversions, where that is not possible, family ties are sometimes broken.

For all of these missionaries the benefits of conversion far outweighed any demands or downsides. For one elder, a downside to joining is “you [potential convert] have to give up the things the world thinks are fun.” The eternal doctrines of the church offer very tangible rewards in this life, including “peace,” “happiness,” “confidence,” “knowledge,” “opportunity” and “progress” all within a moral community in which to “belong and grow” where their “families will be stronger” as a result. For five missionaries there was no downside for joining at all, while four missionaries expressed the other side of the belonging equation, that of demands or sacrifices. If potential

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18 In the majority of interviews, there is a tendency among these participants to use the second-person “you” to refer to various people, converts, new member, and even themselves. For example, instead of saying in the face of rejection “we had to be strong” the participants are likely to phrase the sentence as “you had to be strong” when in fact, they are speaking self-referentially.
converts “can change their lives” and “make the commitments” and “sacrifices needed in order to cast off the natural man” they will share in all the rewards of the new and everlasting covenant.\textsuperscript{19}

When asked the benefits of joining the church, nearly every missionary expressed salvation, or exaltation. The Mormon perspective on salvation is quite unique. One missionary explained: “A lot of religions only believe there is a heaven and a hell. But we give them more of a knowledge of an afterlife, because it makes no sense to me that a murderer and someone who steals a pack of gum would go to the same place. So the three kingdoms of glory, that makes more sense”\textsuperscript{20} where all people arrive at the tier of heaven for which their earthly lives have merited. Ultimately, it is up to each individual whether or not they follow the prophet, keep all their covenants by remaining obedient, raise their families and conduct their congregations in worthiness, and endure until the end. For those who do, the missionaries are clear on the benefits.

**Culture: Transformations and Ambiguities**

The process of conversion can be a profound transformation for the individual and her family ties, and can ripple through her community, breaking those existing families and traditions. As in all new religious movements, there is the possibility of cultural and social change over long periods of time. When discussing with the four sisters how they reconcile their church’s instructions to love all peoples of all cultures and religions with the missionary imperative that sets out to change them, one sister

\textsuperscript{19} Questionnaires compiled dated April 5, 2008.

\textsuperscript{20} Focus group transcript dated April 5, 2008.
responded, “In the same way that God loves us. He sees our weaknesses but knows what we can become.” Another added, “We invite, not force. The invitation is love, and knowing their challenges, I still love them” to which the next sister agreed, “We love them anyway, maybe it just isn’t the right time.” The last sister offered, “It’s not because we think somebody needs to change cultures. We’re not taking away people’s identity, but we are offering something that helped us find ours [identity].” Her sentiment is not unlike that of President Hinckley who told the Australian press in 1997, “We are different. We are unique. We’re not like the rest of the world. We don’t disparage other religions. We think they do great good. We simply say to people, ‘Take all the goodness you have, and come and bring it, and see if we can add to it’” . . . We are a peculiar people” (Hinckley 2005:390); or of former President George Albert Smith who said, “We have come not to take away from you the truth and virtue you possess. We have come not to find fault with you nor to criticize you. . . . We have come here as your brethren . . . to say to you: “Keep all the good that you have, and let us bring to you more good, in order that you may be happier and in order that you may be prepared to enter into the presence of our Heavenly Father”” (Uchtdorf 2008b:294-306).

Mormons are less concerned about differentiation between church and mission and culture than they are about simply doing the missionary work, according to Mormonism’s only missiologist. As Britsch writes, “Latter-day Saints generally have little use for what might be called mission theory. They pursue the work of preaching the gospel in a matter-of-fact manner, worrying little about cultural adaptation and other

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21 Sister focus group transcript dated June 28, 2008.
22 Ibid.
related problems” (1979:24). One of their mission presidents, a convert in the DR, expressed it this way:

It is the same gospel everywhere, the same principles everywhere, it doesn’t matter the culture. So you can go to any country and you’ll find the same programs, and you’ll find people respect the same principles. Temple recommends are given to persons under the same conditions no matter where you are. If a tradition of a culture doesn’t interfere with the gospel, you can continue your tradition and the church encourages it. But, if the tradition has something that doesn’t go with the gospel, then you have to choose whether you are continuing in the church or the cultural tradition.23

For this president and the Mormons in this study, it all comes down to personal agency and the choice between the culture of man and the church, and for them the choice is clearly in favor of the church. Discussing the Cuban tradition of coffee in Miami, he continued,

But if for example, Cuba opens for us, it is hard to imagine no café con leche, but that is something they [a Cuban member] would have to give up – that would be non-negotiable. Like China without its tea. So, Word of Wisdom is doctrine, the principles, and is core Mormonism – those standards are the same for everybody.24

Interpretations of culture are ambiguous, but where Mormons in this study are emphatic is on matters of doctrine. Twenty years earlier, Elder Hinckley was the keynote speaker at a BYU symposium, “The Expanding Church.” The symposium was “the first evidence that the LDS Church recognized the need for cultural adaptation and adjustment in non-doctrinal policies” (Cannon et al. 2003:xxii). In 2008, President Uchtdorf instructed that cultures and societies are man-made and superficial but the eternal “doctrinal truths of the restored gospel will be the guiding star.” This statement is what an FFLM ward mission leader suggested in culture as the great missionary

23 Interview transcript, Mission president, dated April 18, 2008.

24 Ibid.
debate. “The church has certain standards and principles that are God’s; there is no right to change those.”25 There is some fluidity, and applications may vary, for example there could be a cultural evening in the ward with foods and music. But, for instance, it would “not be appropriate in a sacred Sacrament service” to have guitars, which is to imply that organ accompaniment is sacred where guitar accompaniment is not.26

While there is a strong sense of love for the people they will encounter on their missions, there is the suggestion that crossing the religious boundary into the church will ameliorate cultural “weakness” or “challenges” and that will make life, in all its dimensions, better. Changing cultures and changing religions are often seen as separate issues where it is sometimes thought that one can remain, for example, Mexican but be a Mormon. The question becomes, what is the master status? For Gary and Gordon Shepherd serving in Mexico, the cultural attachment of Mexican investigators to the Virgin of Guadalupe “at all levels of Mexican life” highlights the problem. However, while serving their missions “resolute removal” of iconography was a sign of authentic conversion and “commitment to the new religious perspective” (Shepherd and Shepherd 1998:115). “Complete salvation [exaltation] is possible only through the life, death, resurrection, doctrines, and ordinances of Jesus Christ, and in no other way” apart from this church (Millet 1992:724). In other words, from the First Presidency down, church doctrine always trumps culture. Having just touched on this tension in Mormonism at the intersection of culture and religion with the sisters, the


26 For a history of Mormonism and music, see Michael Hicks (2003).
window of time with the men did not allow this conversation, but it is considered again later among returned missionaries.

**Growth and Retention: Better Referrals and Better Methods**

These nine pairs of missionaries have participated in approximately seventy baptisms over the course of various lengths of service up to eighteen months. The participants concede as one elder stated, “Yes, it is a demanding faith but the rewards outweigh the demands. It says in the bible, “faith without works is dead.” If we just have faith and we don’t do nothing [sic], we’ll get nowhere. It is a life of service, progressing, and to work by giving service to others.” Yet, recognizing these recruitment difficulties the church has adapted its approach to finding investigators, and local congregations are implementing change.

Over at least the past two decades the church has become increasingly aware of problems associated with actual growth rates, or the difference between official membership statistics and people in the pews or people who self-identify as Mormon as discussed earlier on the internationalization of the church. Apostle Ballard instructed at the Provo, Utah MTC, in 2000:

You cannot establish the Church in your own area unless you produce real growth—that is, not just growth on paper or in the number of membership records in your ward or stake. Real growth entails increasing the number of participating, dedicated Latter-day Saints. Without a true and effective partnership between leaders, members, and stake and full-time missionaries, growth will be a function of who the missionaries can find by themselves and who by themselves are able to remain active and faithful.

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27 Questionnaires compiled April 5, 2008.

28 Transcript dated April 5, 2008.
Low retention rates among new converts are generally attributed to ineffective recruitment methods that yield unprepared investigators; inactivity among new members is generally thought to result from insufficient fellowshipping, and converts' individual agency. Ballard asserted that only ten percent of new investigators in the first lesson were member referrals. Especially during the first five years, new converts are particularly vulnerable to falling away (Albrecht 1998:263). The “costs of inactivity” are high for everyone involved—the convert, the congregation, and the mission program. Stewart quotes President Gordon B. Hinckley, “What does it profit the missionary to baptize someone who leaves the Church within six months? Nothing is accomplished; in fact, damage is done. We have pulled them away from their old moorings and brought them into the Church, only to have them drift away.” Stewart goes on, “Those who lapse in fulfillment of solemn covenants find their eternal prospects worse than if they had never met the missionaries at all” (2007:244).

For congregations “inactivity saps vitality,” depleting morale, overwhelming leadership and active members with more responsibilities or with what Lannaconne (1997) calls free-riders. The missionary program suffers in redundancies, re-recruiting people already counted on the membership roles, which results in high opportunity costs for teaching what missionaries call ‘golden investigators’ or well prepared investigators of great conversion potential. “Today we spend a majority of our time attempting to rehabilitate those members that were baptized years ago without adequate preparation” (Stewart 2007:246). In other words, there are problems keeping people active in the covenant because there are problems recruiting investigators who are adequately prepared to know what they are committing to.
To remedy this situation, Apostle Ballard said the local leaders need only turn to the 1998 First Presidency instructions and implement the more balanced method where members supply the referrals rather than missionaries having to find potential converts through tracting and street methods.\textsuperscript{29} If new recruits are generated through membership, or what Stark and Bainbridge call “interpersonal networks” there is a higher likelihood the new convert will remain active (1996:18; 1985:316-320). The best possible outcomes for real church growth will result when members are more involved, because they serve as exemplary models of “what it truly means to be a Latter-day Saint;” they provide informal teaching, and they help integrate new investigators into congregational living (Ballard 2000). If members refer investigators it is believed they are more likely to “stay with the program” than if a missionary cold calls knocking on doors.

Toward generating better referrals, in this study the missionaries reported that they now tract very little with men generating more teaching appointments (fifteen percent) in the street than the women (five percent), who mentioned that the street is not safe in some areas for them to work. Moreover, an elder serving an English mission in predominantly Spanish-speaking Miami said that knocking on doors tracting is ineffective; “no hablo ingles.”\textsuperscript{30} The approximate levels of membership referrals for teaching appointments are somewhat improved over the cited ten percent, up at thirty-five percent. Among this small sample of missionaries in the FFLM however, the majority of their appointments remain in reactivating members, some fifty percent for the

\textsuperscript{29} In returned missionary Joseph L. Bishop’s 1982 book, *The Making of a Missionary*, he includes a chapter on members finding the investigators so the idea has been in circulation for almost 30 years.

\textsuperscript{30} The necessity of more Spanish-speaking or bilingual missionaries in the Miami area was corroborated by a ward mission leader. Transcript dated June 27, 2008.
elders and seventy percent for the sisters.\textsuperscript{31} In a conversation with a mission president, he said this emphasis on members finding investigators is relatively new and members tend to operate according to the older system where missionaries found their own investigators by tractering.\textsuperscript{32} The old method of cold calling, or knocking on doors tractering, left new members adrift and disconnected once missionaries were transferred, if there was an absence of adequate fellowshipping in the wards.

New converts becoming overly attached to missionaries has been a perennial problem for the church. In the past, those missionary-investigator relationships were often seen as providential, where the missionaries had arrived at a serendipitous moment of crisis for the potential convert, taught them in their homes, sometimes taught their family members, and saw them through a transition from difficult days to membership in the church (Lasater 2003). Not only is everyone heartbroken when the missionaries are subsequently transferred or return home, breaking those primary mission relationships, but valuable role models are removed from the new convert and her family. They are left more or less adrift in the new congregations where they suffer high attrition rates. The ward mission leader continued, “So, now members are doing the finding, discussions are taught in the members’ homes, and if the missionary leaves it is fine.”\textsuperscript{33} Instead of the convert’s attachment to a transient missionary, now the convert’s connection is with their friend, the member, and the ward. “Retentions improved immediately” and “the members are much more proactive in sharing the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} Elder questionnaires compiled April 5, 2008; sister questionnaires June 28, 2008.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Field notes dated February 19, 2008.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Transcript dated June 25, 2008.
\end{itemize}
gospel with people they know. It is working much better in that respect. It isn’t perfect yet.”  

Without exception, every participant said the remedy to the retention problem is found in the membership who must actively fellowship new converts. Gordon B. Hinckley is widely quoted in Mormon circles, including in this focus group when three missionaries expressed, “Every convert needs three things: a friend, a responsibility, and nurturing with ‘the good word of God.’” (Hinckley 1999). Through strong membership support, the participants also said that new members would necessarily grow in their testimonies, would learn more about doctrine and scriptures, would keep their commandments (or covenants), would avoid “worldliness” and continue to come to church. According to one missionary, “Actually, do your home teaching and visiting teaching,” which are regularly scheduled visitations conducted by the priesthood and Relief Society, respectively. In addition to fellowshipping new converts, “Every person in the church should be a missionary, living by example. The members are supposed to share. Then, we’re here as an asset to teach and baptize people. It’s a natural thing like going to a movie, you tell all your friends about it.”

But there is a downside to the loss of tracting, according to this ward mission leader. He had served a proselyting mission in southern Latin America in the early days of the church when tracting was the norm, before there were many members to make referrals. The loss of tracting has taken from the missionaries the opportunity for intervention by the Holy Ghost. He explained that the mission has a huge population,

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34 Interview transcript April 18, 2008.
and each bishop is accountable to the Lord, spiritually and temporally, for all people who live within his ward’s boundaries.

I anguish over how are we reaching the 180,000 people who live in our ward boundaries who have spiritual and temporal needs and we don’t know who they are. Having worked in the mission and having interviewed numerous people who were accepting baptism [when] just before their baptism, many of them were praying to God asking for direction – and please send them someone. And suddenly, the missionaries knock on their door. This happens so many, many times. Take away tracting and this no longer happens and I anguish over this. 35

The providential role of the missionaries’ tracting was instrumental among the small sample of converts in the Dominican Republic and among Latino converts members in the FFLM (Lasater 2003:117-119). More important than the role of LDS members, this is likely attributable to the fact that most of the converts were the first in their families in Latin American and Caribbean countries where the church was in its youth without a sufficient membership to provide referrals. Such divine missionary interventions made possible by tracting are a common folk narrative among missionaries (Embry 1998:185). In the U. S. where congregations are more mature with strong members and leadership, this transition to member-generated investigators seems reasonable among the LDS. As for replacing the tracting method, the ward mission leader prayed for an answer.

If the bishop is responsible, then so am I. I’ve been praying a lot and praying about it. It consumes my days and nights. I think I got my answer. We started talking about it – there are a corps of young RMs just returned who still have the spirit. What if they asked for inspiration, focusing on a region and knocking on doors, to find these individuals? I did it on my mission, and my area was huge. I didn’t have time to randomly knock on doors – I had to have [divine] inspiration and I was regularly in the right place and right time. [In this ward] I have better than full time missionaries, I’ve got RMs who are already trained and have spent

their missions knocking on doors, including myself. Why not continue with the same process to reach people?36

This ward mission leader sought divine inspiration for another creative method to reach investigators rather than shifting entirely away from tracting and street work, which he and other returned missionaries have described as often inspired yielding those ‘golden investigators’ – those who were ripe for conversion. Not only are there people out there who need this opportunity, the wards also need them for growth. Such entrepreneurial leadership serves both a practical and spiritual dilemma.

When our ward is having trouble growing, [it] probably has a lot more to do with the culture and economy in South Florida. And the cost of living requiring more work, so more families are moving out than are moving in. And a lot of families don’t want to raise their young children in South Florida; would rather move into more wholesome family oriented communities. I anguish that we only have eighty to ninety people [in our ward]. So, I’ve put the idea out there. This is how I served my mission – I spent a lot of time on my knees in anguish that I might miss someone who needed me.37

This ward is experiencing growth problems, and incidentally, it has no elders serving as missionaries. The ward mission leader explained that the absence of men to baptize is not a large problem, because any priesthood holder can confer baptism. Meanwhile, they have sister missionaries teaching. Considering that the feminine features in the mission were thought to be a positive influence, are more women warranted in mission service? Overwhelmingly among men and women alike, the answer was ‘no, leave the church emphasis on men as it is.’ Even among these women missionaries, one said:

No, it is appropriate the way it is; expected of men and a choice for women. But the de-emphasis on women [serving] also causes misunderstandings. The

36 Interview transcript, RMM, dated June 25, 2008.
37 Ibid.
elders have asked, ‘why are you serving? Couldn’t you find a husband? Or what is wrong with you? Or you must be frumpy.’ To some extent by saying that women don’t have to serve somehow implies that women shouldn’t serve. Perhaps if more women served that mentality might change.38

The church potentially has thousands of women who could serve as approachable messengers in the mission field where men cannot, and they are thought to bring a balance of feminine attributes to the overwhelmingly masculine missions, even if these roles are often more stereotype than substance. Women serve an overwhelmingly positive role as discussed among these missionaries. Along with the returned missionaries later in the study, none of the participants in this study think there should be any change in church policy toward women in service. Given the changes in missionary numbers, the church would do well to encourage, or expect as they do the men, more women to serve. And as faithful members, these participants will quickly adapt to follow their leaders’ call.

Assessing Missionary Change in the FFLM

Between 2008 and 2010 the numbers of missionaries in the FFLM fell from 144 to 129 or about ten percent (Appendix D). As one mission president suggested, the cumulative effects of smaller-sized LDS families, the fact that only one-third of eligible aged men serve, plus “raising the bar” has yielded few missionaries. Further, the FFLM is “receiving less missionaries trained in other languages, in particular Spanish and ASL, because there is more demand of them in the rest of the world.”39 But as a higher number of baptisms suggests, the mission president said the FFLM is also baptizing more converts with fewer missionaries.

38 Sister focus group transcript dated June 28, 2008.
39 Email in possession of author, dated June 20, 2012.
The Church is growing and expanding in a sustained ascending line, while we have to do the work with less missionaries. Even though, the FFLM is baptizing more than double than five years ago. Again, with about sixty less missionaries we are producing 100% more. Why? This new generation of missionaries is more obedient, better spiritually prepared, and the most important, this is the work of the Lord.40

A recent article in the church newspaper, the Deseret News states as of June 2012, the current mission president said there were 440 baptisms in the first half of 2012 compared to 250 the first half of 2011. Total baptisms from 2000 to 2010 were 6,100, and with a total of 18,000 members in the FFLM (Davis 2012).41

As the total number of active proselytizing missionaries decreased, so too, did the number of those assigned to English, from sixty-eight to thirty-eight, spread across the northerly and southerly parts of the mission. Spanish language missionaries increased from sixty-one to sixty-nine overall and Creole went from eight to eighteen. Creole and Spanish saw most of their gains in the northerly part of the mission.

Language assignments are a response to demographic changes within the mission.

There are two important things to be said about demographics in Southeast Florida. First, this area has a large Latino population (approximately sixty-five percent in Miami-Dade; twenty-five percent in Broward; and nineteen percent in Palm Beach). Therefore, a reduction in English and an increase in Spanish-speaking missionaries adapts to those needs.

40 Email in possession of author, dated June 20, 2012.

41 According to official church statistics the FFLM membership at year end 2002 was 14,749 and by year end 2010 was 27,242. If in June 2012 the newspaper reports 18,000 members, which is a loss of some 9,000 members. Although the mission is losing members due to a large outmigration during this economic slowdown, it may be that the official numbers are again reflective of an over-count if the mission’s report of 18,000 is membership in attendance.
Second, the increase in Spanish and Creole in the northerly half of the mission may be a response to a shift in migration. As mission presidents have indicated, as immigrants become increasingly better off they move northerly and westerly. Changes may also signal the mission’s responsiveness to its missionaries and ward leaders who have noticed that effective fieldwork in a multi-lingual area needs multi-lingual missionaries.

During this fieldwork an English-assigned missionary and a ward mission leader indicated that to be bilingual would have been to better affect in the South Florida area. Too often, they felt, their knocks at the door were answered with “no hablo ingles” for which there was no further recourse. Perhaps it was even possible that the answer in Spanish was a ruse but there was no way to know or anything they could do about it. To be bilingual, minimally Spanish and English, in such a multi-lingual place as the FFLM would be advantageous as all of the Creole- and or Spanish-speaking missionaries are fluent in both; the English-only missionaries felt they were at a disadvantage. With an imperative to make the gospel available in every tongue, the FFLM will continue to work toward finding those optimal balances between demands and supplies.

Inviting all to come unto Christ is a fulfillment of the covenant imperative and through teaching the restored gospel of Jesus Christ the missionaries accomplish their primary purpose. They acknowledge that the spirit moves a person to listen when that person is ready, and her quest might be to fill some need, temporal or spiritual. Or, in my case, the quest is an intellectual one. Toward a better understanding of this religion, I asked to receive the missionary discussions. I wanted to learn the content of their
teachings; explore the missionary—investigator relationship; and experience the covenant expectations of potential new members. Learning from the missionaries through *Preach My Gospel* is the topic of Chapter 9.
CHAPTER 9
MISSIONARIES AND AN INVESTIGATOR: *PREACH MY GOSPEL*

In *Preach My Gospel* (2004:1-15), the missionary’s purpose is to convince potential converts of the need for a restoration, the veracity of the Book of Mormon, the authority of modern prophets, and the truth of this one church. By telling this story time and again, the missionaries restore the sacred canopy and build the collective chain of memory, through each successive generation of new members. Most importantly, the purpose of teaching is to do so ‘with the spirit’ so that others can experience the spirit’s presence. The investigator is asked to read specific verses from the Book of Mormon and ask for a confirming personal revelation, the ‘still, small voice’ of the Holy Ghost. After the lessons, and repentance, and in the event of a testimony received, the investigator is then baptized by full immersion. In the baptismal covenant, “our first covenant” (*Preach My Gospel* 2004:63), the candidate “promises “to come into the fold of God, *and to be called his people*, . . . to bear one another’s burdens, . . . to mourn with those that mourn, and . . . to stand as witness of God . . . even until death” . . . A person must enter this covenant with the proper attitudes of humility, repentance, and determination to keep the Lord’s commandments, and serve God to the end . . .” (Wilson 1992:94; emphasis added).

The other important aspect of teaching is for the missionaries to explain what the investigator will be committing to should she decide to join the church. In addition to studying with the missionaries, the investigator will be asked to read from the Book of Mormon prayerfully asking for divine inspiration, attend weekly Sunday services for three hours, and adhere to the Word of Wisdom, with a challenge from the missionaries, which in my case was giving up coffee. These efforts in participant observation
provided for this investigator a better understanding of the covenant requirements of this church, and it exposed the precarious position of the ethnographer as investigator. For new converts, they will be asked to serve callings, serve missions if eligible, perfect the saints and seal their families in the temple, by making and keeping their covenants.

**Investigating Mormonism**

The missionaries taught me through the course of six meetings the five lessons contained in Preach My Gospel, their missionary teaching guide. Out of deference to their schedules, we kept our meetings to about thirty minutes; as instructed in typical teaching style they are not to exceed about forty-five minutes with any investigators. The missionaries are to ‘teach by the spirit, rather than by the rote memorization method of the past, following the lesson outline only as a guide. This teaching style leaves the missionaries responsive and flexible to the needs of their investigators. Every lesson was opened and closed with a prayer by one of the missionaries, asking for divine inspiration to guide their teaching and my inquiry. The italicized vignettes that follow are taken from the transcript notes of each lesson. The purpose is to provide an illustration and impression of the missionary teaching environment, the body of knowledge particular to Mormon teachings, the interaction between missionaries and investigator, and the expectations for joining this community. After each vignette, there is a short commentary relating their lesson to this larger work.

*First Lesson: The Restoration:* After meeting the two elders assigned to teach me the missionary lessons, we begin with a prayer for inspiration and guidance. In our first lesson they provided an overview of Mormon teachings on God’s salvation history. First, they spoke to me about the plan of happiness, also known as the plan of salvation. We are all God’s spirit children; we come to Earth through embodiment.
Ideally, we are to learn the gospel so we are born into a family where the father holds the priesthood through which we undertake the ordinances of salvation. We read from the Hebrew prophet, Amos 3:7, that in all dispensations prophets have been revealed; “indeed, the Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants, the prophets.” There have been seven major dispensations, and they all are characterized by prophets, the priesthood and apostles. Each dispensation comes to an end when the prophets and apostles are killed. The teachings are rejected, and this characterizes apostasy. Prophets foretold of the coming of Jesus Christ and through him in Gethsemane, physical and spiritual death were conquered. He called 12 apostles, established his church and was crucified. Three days later, he arose from the dead and appeared to his followers. We read from Paul’s letters, Ephesians 2:19 and 20, where Paul invites all gentiles into the covenant united in Christ, built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets “with Jesus Christ as the capstone.” Within a few generations of 325 c.e, all the apostles had been killed and the foundation that Jesus had built for his church had fallen into the Great Apostasy. Then, God called a new prophet, Joseph Smith Jr., and we read from James 1: 5-6, where Joseph Smith was inspired to ask God, with faith, about his confusion of which church to join: “If any of you is without wisdom, let him ask it from the God who gives generously and ungrudgingly to all, and it will be given him …” if asked in faith. The answer was given in the First Vision of two personages, the Heavenly Father and his son Jesus Christ, appear to Joseph Smith. For homework, they asked me to read the Book of Mormon Introduction and 3 Nephi 11 and from Moroni 10: 3-5. We ended with a prayer of thanksgiving. I gave them cookies
from Maureen, and they departed after about a 25 minute lesson.\(^1\)

The scriptures the missionaries shared are instructive beyond the lesson itself because together they provide the overview of the covenant in Mormon teachings, taking the message of the Hebrew prophet Amos as the place to begin. God does nothing without revealing it to his prophets. A prophet is a man called by God as his spokesman and messenger of those revelations. Only the people of God, through obedience, have access to this transcendent knowledge. But in Paul’s letter, that privileged knowledge available only to his chosen Israelites becomes available universally in Jesus Christ through the missionary work of Paul and the disciples. Once squandered in apostasy, again, it would be some fourteen hundred years later when Joseph Smith’s confusion over which religious sect to join prompted his turning to James. Ask, and it will be given, if you first have faith in God and his son Jesus Christ. The answer was the First Vision in which the Christological crisis of the incomprehensible Trinity was uniquely resolved for Joseph Smith and his subsequent followers, inaugurating the final restoration before the Second Coming.

In what would become the “one true church,” the homework assigned – 3 Nephi 11, Book of Mormon Introduction, and Moroni 10:3-5 – constructs the sacred canopy of Mormonism and establishes God’s chosen people in the final dispensation. 3 Nephi 11 is the story of Jesus Christ ministering to the chosen Nephites, the scattered Israelites in the Americas. The Introduction to the Book of Mormon explains how this narrative in the Americas was recorded on plates saved by the last Nephite, Moroni, and about fourteen hundred years later revealed to Joseph Smith, translated and witnessed by

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\(^1\) Transcript dated February 5, 2008.
eleven men, establishing “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord’s kingdom once again established on the earth, preparatory to the second coming of the Messiah” (first page, Introduction; emphasis added). That the church is the Lord’s kingdom rather than the vehicle toward the establishment of the Lord’s kingdom is an important point. For example, in liberation theology God’s kingdom is understood as already; not yet. In other words, through Jesus Christ the kingdom has presented itself as already available and possible, but through the imperfections of humans, it is not yet established and still out of reach. Conversely, for Mormons, the kingdom of God on earth is here in the church with the ancient authority of the priesthood restored.

To know if all these things are true, every new investigator is asked to obtain her own testimony by reading prayerfully from Moroni, the last book in the Book of Mormon, which was written by the final Nephite for future generations:

Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been upon the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts. And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things (Moroni 10:3-5; emphases added).

“Moroni’s promise” is the paradigmatic passage assigned to evoke within the investigator a personal revelation of confirmation by the Holy Ghost. After reading and receiving all wisdom since Adam and pondering all these things, then the supplicant is to ask if it is possible that these thing are not true, followed by a manifestation of truth by the Holy Ghost. James said, “Ask, and it will be given.” In all missionary training, including in Preach My Gospel, the missionaries are taught to ‘teach by the spirit,’ taking
inspiration from their preparations for an investigator. This selective juxtaposition of scriptures within the context of the missionary’s first lesson demonstrate a poetic – no doubt inspired in their view – rendering of the restoration of the covenant to its righteous people in the Americas, both ancient and modern.

Second Lesson: Plan of Salvation. The following Friday, we began with a prayer for guidance and inspiration. I reported that I had done my homework, and I have a few questions. I asked why there were two different and separate testimonies given regarding the Book of Mormon. The elders explained that this was due to a fulfillment of prophecy that said there would be three witnesses (2 Nephi 27), and eight witnesses. The first three appear to have been shown the gold tablets at the behest of God. The second group of eight appears to have been shown the tablets thanks to Joseph Smith. I suggested that 3 Nephi 11:27 hints at a Trinitarian godhead. The missionaries explained it is not to be misunderstood that way due to Joseph Smith’s First Vision. Clearly, the father and son are separate personages, one and exactly the same in purpose and mission along with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the third person, is a spirit and unlike the father and son does not have a flesh and bones body. So while they are separate they are one in purpose. My last question is: where are the original written translations by Joseph Smith? The elders explained those are in the safekeeping of the church.

Next we took up the plan of salvation. The elders took out some little laminated discs that had little color crayon cartoon drawings of each step in the plan of salvation. They were much like you would use with a child. We all exist in the pre-mortal life with the Heavenly Father, the father of our spirits. The Heavenly Father has a glorified body.
But we are spirit children. We are embodied to inhabit the earth; and Adam and Eve were the first parents. They were to multiply, and they were not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Here we read from the 2 Nephi 2: 22-25 and 11-13 that without “opposition in all things” we cannot know happiness in the absence of misery. So in God’s plan of salvation Adam and Eve had to disobey and become human so that they would experience agency, human life, marriage, having children and dying. And so it is for us humans. We become embodied, and we are here on an earthly probation. Then God sent Jesus Christ to overcome both spiritual death and physical death. He suffered and died and was resurrected three days later. When we die all spirits go to the spirit world. In the chapters of the book of Alma 40:11 - 14 and 41, he teaches his sons that the righteous will be restored to goodness and the wicked will be restored to wickedness. All people good and bad will be resurrected and their spirits will be reunited with their bodies. After a prayer, I gave them a bag of cookies, and we made an appointment for the following Monday. ²

The scriptures in this lesson were from the Book of Mormon. Two themes are expressed in the Introduction to the Book of Mormon, as Apostle Jeffrey Holland demonstrates.

After reading these three witnesses from the small plates of Nephi, the reader knows two things in bold relief: that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and that God will keep his covenants and promises with the remnants of the house of Israel. These two themes constitute the two principal purposes of the Book of Mormon, and they are precisely the introductory themes addressed by Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah” (Bokovoy 2011:31).

From ancient prophets through Book of Mormon prophets to prophets in these latter-

² Transcript dated February 8, 2008.
days the lineage of concern is the covenant people who, in following Christ as the Messiah, keep their covenant promises in “convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ” (*Book of Mormon*, Introduction).

Second Nephi also instructs on the loftiest attribute of humanity – that of agency, which is the human characteristic necessary for discipleship in Christ. For the LDS, Adam’s free agency as discussed in 2 Nephi is one of the most important lessons contained in the plan of salvation. The plan of salvation, which “begins in eternity and ends in eternity” (Davies 2006:12) is a particular Mormon understanding of the fall of Adam and the salvation of humankind by Christ’s conquest of death. Rather than Adam’s fall rendering humanity depraved by original sin, Adam’s choice demonstrated the unlimited human freedom that is necessary to existence, progression and ultimately to salvation, or what Mormons call exaltation. In other words, human agency exercised in this embodiment on earth will determine each person’s degree of salvation in the afterlife. While humans do not inherit Adam’s original sin, we are responsible for our own lives. To expiate Adam’s disobedience, Jesus gave his obedient life as a sacrifice (Davies 2000:54).

Through the atonement of Jesus Christ, like him, our eternal reward awaits for a righteous life lived according to this covenant. For Alma, the “first and chief judge of the Nephites” the profound human choice is between wickedness and the model of perfection in Jesus Christ. This Mormon optimism in human agency points to the potential of human progress and freedom, which is dramatically different than the doctrines of human depravity and sin inherited from Adam’s fall in traditional Christianity (McMurrin 1965). The concept of a covenant recapitulated in each dispensation since
Adam guides as a sacred canopy the Latter-day people of this dispensation. In return for God’s favor, they keep his covenant by making new horizontal covenants, or linkages in the chain of memory and lineages of belief.

Third Lesson: The Gospel of Jesus Christ. We opened with a prayer and went right to the book of Alma and discussed the final dispensation as the final restoration of what the church was originally all the way back to Adam. In Alma 34: 34 – 35, the chief judge makes clear that there is no such thing as deathbed repentance. At resurrection, the glorified body and spirit are reunited for judgment according to what is merited. There are three different degrees of glory, taken from Paul’s letter 1 Corinthians 15:40 – 41. The highest degree of glory is the Celestial Kingdom associated with the sun. And this is where temple sealed families live for eternity. Available only through the priesthood holder, Mormons know what discipline and obedience are required to reach this place with their families. The second heavenly place is the Terrestrial Kingdom associated with the moon and the third is the Telestial Kingdom of the stars. The missionaries explained that Mormons are not certain who ends up in these two lower kingdoms, but they are not concerned with those because they aren’t shooting for either, nor are they baptizing others for the lower kingdoms. Those who have faith, repent, and are baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, live righteous and endure to the end will be rewarded with the Celestial Kingdom. This Celestial Kingdom is where God and the heavenly mother dwell and all righteous Mormon couples will enjoy eternal progress and procreation forever.³

Now if a person dies without any knowledge of Mormonism or Jesus Christ for

³ This eternal place of progress and increase is also where plural marriage may still be implemented, not according to what the Elders taught, but according to a member I had shared lunch with.
that matter, it is believed that in the spirit world, they can actually be baptized, coinciding with their vicarious baptism through a relative on earth in a temple, but it is still believed to be an invitation. If accepted, then all the temple ordinances are equally accepted by the deceased relative. At some point in this dispensation, Jesus will return to reign for 1000 years. For homework, the elders asked me to read, Alma 32 – 34. We ended with a prayer and I gave them a large bag of trail mix. Wednesday will be transfer day so, either of the elders might be replaced or transferred to another zone; we’ll meet again on Thursday.4

Chapter 34 in Alma, on faith and repentance, is especially important for three reasons particular to Mormonism: First, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is prophesized in the ancient Americas when the prophet instructed that the Mosaic Law foreshadowed the atonement. The connection between old world and new world prophets is unique. Second, it underscores in Mormonism the necessity of faith and works in this life; grace alone is not sufficient for Mormon exaltation. Third, this passage involved a re-reading of the prohibition on deathbed conversions, which the missionaries might have intended specifically for their investigator. “The eternal plan of redemption is based on faith and repentance. . . . This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God. . . . Work out your salvation with fear before God, and that ye should no more deny the coming of Christ.”
This third and final lesson in the restoration of the covenant – all things since Adam, and redeemed in Jesus Christ, provides the whole of salvation history up to the Great Apostasy, and the role of Joseph Smith, his church, his scripture, and the missionaries. Finally, the Pauline degrees of salvation glory are unique to Mormonism. These

4 Transcript dated February 11, 2008.
teachings comprise the new and everlasting covenant gift of God to the Mormons, and through them to all humanity. The costs – or the covenant promises made in return – are captured in lessons four and five.

**Fourth Lesson: The Commandments.** Well beyond the Mosaic ten commandments, the Mormon commandments contained in the covenant obligations include: obedience; prayer; scripture study; keeping the Sabbath holy; Baptism and Confirmation; following the prophet; keeping the Ten Commandments; upholding the law of chastity; obeying the Word of Wisdom; paying a full tithe; observing fast once a month for the poor; and honoring the law of the land (Preach My Gospel 2004:71-81). With a new elder we began with a prayer, and then we read from John 3: 16 and 17, after which they discussed the teachings of Jesus Christ in its simplicity: that the teachings of Jesus Christ require a commitment to a lifestyle change. The first teaching is the tenant of faith, Alma 32: 21, 26, 27. Although we have not seen Jesus Christ, we have faith, which is not to be confused with perfect knowledge. Even a particle of faith will give us a desire to know Jesus Christ and live accordingly. The second tenet of teachings is that of repentance. We read 3 Nephi 27: 19 – 20. Through Jesus Christ, we should anticipate this process of repentance: to feel sorrow and recognize it; ask and pray for forgiveness; provide restitution; and avoid repeating the same mistake again. The third tenant is taken from Mosiah 18: 10; baptism in water by the proper authority through Jesus Christ into the kingdom of God. This is the story of the baptism of Alma as a witness of repentance, who is baptized by immersion in water and commits to a covenant relationship with God, wherein there are mutual promises. The fourth tenet of the faith is the baptism by fire or the laying on of hands that confers the Holy
Ghost from 3 Nephi 27: 19 -- 20. The fifth tenet of faith is living by trials and ‘enduring to the end,’ following the long and narrow path, accepting the fulness of the gospel through the proper keys of authority in the priesthood. This is from 2 Nephi 31: 19-20.

The new elder asked what I thought about the truth of the Book of Mormon. And I explained to him as I had the other two elders that I don't have an opinion about the truth of the Book of Mormon. As with other books of scriptures, I have no reason to arbitrate the absolute truth of the Book of Mormon. They invited me to Sacrament Service on Sunday, but I advised I had already committed to returning to Plantation [Ward]. But I promised I would attend the Flagler Ward before I leave the first week of March. We ended with a prayer.  

The new elder was not particularly satisfied with my answer regarding the Book of Mormon but his junior companion did not weigh into the discussion having heard my explanation before. In a subsequent conversation, the topic came up again and our discussion took up the idea of where is truth found, if it is in any scriptures is it relative? In my thinking, if anything is possible in the mind of God, he can deliver truth wherever he chooses and I cannot possibly ascertain the mind of God. For Mormons, revelation provides their window into the mind of God.

John 3:16 is the scripture most often referenced by evangelical Protestants who believe in the unconditional grace of God as the saving force of humanity: “…God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him man not die but may have eternal life.” And verse 17 continues, “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” Most

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5 Transcript dated February 14, 2008.
Mormons, like most Catholics and many Protestants, believe in the necessity of works; from James 2:14-26. The basic recipe for salvation from the fourth Article of Faith is in this order: faith, repentance, baptism by water, baptism by the Holy Ghost, and living by trial ‘enduring to the end.’ This recipe could be the same for any Christian, generally speaking. ‘Enduring to the end’ in Mormon teachings is not simply a “born again” resistance to the adversary by grace alone, but requires collaborating in the Lord’s work, by service in church missions and callings, and in the larger community as an example of Christian love in action.

Fifth Lesson: Laws and Ordinances. Today the elders and I open with a prayer for inspiration. And then took up the 10 Commandments. We are to follow the commandments, and then God promises blessings. We read from the book of Alma 17:2-3. The sons of Mosiah had been missionizing in many lands, and they returned, much stronger in faith. We are stronger in prayer, in Scripture study, and in fasting. The Fast and Testimony Sunday is with that specific purpose in mind. Keeping holy the Sabbath day includes worshiping Jesus Christ and focusing on the holy life. It calls for rejoicing, rather than abstinence. So, I hoped that because Mormon Steve Young participates in football on Sundays so too can I, and I concluded that I would hope God likes football. We had a great laugh. One elder suggested I should pray about how to spend Sundays.

We then turned to Mosiah 12: 12 – 24 where we found the Ten Mosaic Commandments. From Amos 3:7 we learned that we must always follow the prophet’s guide because to the prophet truth is revealed. From Alma 39:3-5 is the law of chastity, elaborating on adultery and fornication. The law of tithing or giving ten percent of one's
income, returns blessings in abundance, which is found in Malachi 3: 8 – 12. All monies collected are for building God's kingdom, including buildings, meeting houses and temples. In Doctrines & Covenants: 89, we find the Word of Wisdom. I confided to the elders that I love coffee.

Taking up the Articles of Faith most of these are already covered in the prior lessons, so we recapped quickly. The twelfth article, which states that we will uphold the law of the land, means no teachings in Mormonism will trump the law of the nation. Depending on the investigator's needs and progress, a person can be ready for baptism after the fifth lesson. In my case, studying the church for academic reasons, the missionaries suggested two more lessons, one on the priesthood and finishing with a lesson on temple ordinances. We ended with a prayer of thanksgiving, after which the elders challenged me to give up coffee for the rest of my time in South Florida, and I agreed.  

Beyond the Mosaic commandments, the particular Mormon requirements are clear: missionary work, following the Prophet, reverence for the Sabbath, and obedience to laws of chastity, tithing, and the Word of Wisdom (Preach My Gospel 2004:71-81). These are the covenant promises that are often hard to make and harder to keep, especially the Word of Wisdom. Chapters 1–9 contain the prohibitions on “wine or strong drink,” tobacco, and “hot drinks” which Mormons typically interpret to mean coffee and tea; drugs are excluded as well. Chapters 10–17 admonish moderation and gratitude in all “herbs, fruits, flesh, and grain.” Not only will the obedient be blessed with “health in their navel and marrow to their bones” they shall find “wisdom and great

6 Transcript dated February 20, 2008.
treasures of knowledge . . .” if they follow these commands. The Word of Wisdom, as particular as it is, serves in “strengthening the boundaries of truth and enhancing the sense of Mormon identity” (Davies 2000:35). For Mormons, because the prohibited substances and excessive diets are associated with impaired health, the dietary proscriptions also serve as a guideline for health and a test of obedience requiring embodied discipline to meet the requirements of the faith.

The Twelfth Article of Faith, in particular, obedience to the law of the land has implications for the church in immigration. For the missionaries, the church does not get involved in politics so immigration status is inconsequential to them. In conversations with mission officials, the immigration status of potential converts is not a concern for the mission, except to lament the toll deportations take on families, which are not within their control. In anecdotal conversations around the mission however, deportations are also destabilizing for local leadership in wards and branches. But for proselytizing purposes, missionaries are not to inquire into documentation status because the gospel is to be made available to all people wherever they may be. Therefore, the church invites all into baptism but does not serve a “sanctuary purpose” because the church upholds the law of the land.

Sixth Lesson: Priesthood. Baptism by the only correct priesthood authority on earth is “the gate” to all the blessings of the church. The priesthood is restored through the “keys of the kingdom of God” and the priesthood is assigned the duty of missionary work wherever the “field is white already to harvest” as we read in D&C 65 and D&C 4. The Great Apostasy had removed the priesthood keys from the earth, necessitating

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7 Although members think the church does not get involved in political matters, the public role of the church is well known on California’s Proposition Eight.
their restoration in this final dispensation. The first priesthood covenant is conferred on males at ages 12 to 18, the Aaronic order, or lower Levitical priesthood, by revelation from John the Baptist to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. The second, or high priesthood, is the order of Melchizedek for men of 18 years and older, which confers the keys through revelation from Peter, James and John to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. With the Melchizedek priesthood, these worthy men are positioned for any offices or callings throughout the worldwide church. Similarly, females advance through Young Women, ages 12-17, and into Relief Society for adult women at 18, positioned to hold any worldwide women’s positions. While women may not hold the priesthood, they do missionary work, serve callings, and hold women’s offices; these women’s auxiliaries are under the aegis of the priesthood. According to revelation, when the church is in every country on earth then the Second Coming can occur.

Meanwhile, the Lord’s work is service of every kind, missionary, fellowshipping, charity and keeping all the covenants. In Moroni 7 we are reminded that the Spirit helps us discern good from evil where all good things come from God; all evil is the work of Satan, which we are to avoid and repent. In John 21:15-17, Jesus tells Peter to “feed my lambs” and “tend my sheep” meaning priesthood holders are to act as a shepherd; and in Mosiah 2:17, any service is also in service to God. Because as James said, faith without works is dead. And then, all saints are called to endure to the end as Paul encouraged his followers; “I did not run the race in vain or work to no purpose” (Phil. 2:12). In Alma 32:41-43, the word is as a seed cultivated to yield eternal life. “And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is
most precious, … and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye
hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.” And 2 Nephi 31:19-21 brings it all together: we must
“press forward” in faith, diligence, and patience, nourishing the word to bear fruit in our
lives,” and “endure to the end.” After a prayer we closed our lesson.⁸

This lesson underscored the role of the priesthood in every domain within this
church. “The kingdom of God on earth exists wherever the priesthood of God is. . . . At
present it is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The church was
established by divine authority to prepare its members to live forever in the Celestial
Kingdom or kingdom of God in heaven.” (Pace 1992:790). After making the baptismal
covenant at age 8, it is of no small consequence that LDS boys as young as twelve
make their first priesthood covenant. Anticipatory socialization is begun at a young age,
gradually disciplining them. Not only are these youngsters privileged with the lineage
but it comes with significant covenant obligations. They must remain worthy throughout
adolescence and they will perform the duties associated with deacon, teacher, and
priest within the order. These young men have the sacred responsibilities of preparing,
administering and distributing the Sacrament by which all members renew their
covenants weekly; they assist the bishops in any ward capacities; they participate in
cohort quorums led by high priests; and they assist in monthly ‘home teaching’ among
the members, check on the sick, and at age sixteen as priests, undergo the transition
and training for the Melchizedek priesthood.

Receiving the Melchizedek order at eighteen young men may participate in the
elders’ quorums; they serve missions as early as age nineteen and baptize new

members; and they perform priesthood blessings and healings. The offices within this order include elder (serve missions), high priest (local leadership), patriarch (stake “father”), the Seventy, and Apostles. As a Melchizedek priesthood holder, any of these young men could conceivably become apostles or even the prophet later in life. And in any case, while no one is supposed to aspire to any ecclesiastical office, they will no doubt serve in various adult leadership positions.

Seventh lesson: Temple Ordinances. Only by being worthy members can families be joined in the eternities. Temple endowments are rituals in which “a gift of power and knowledge from on high” (Preach My Gospel 2004:86) is typically received in preparation for missionary service for men (and women) and prior to marriage for women (and men). Worthy men and women marry for time and eternity in the temple, under which their children are “born in the covenant.” Or if they didn’t marry in the temple, such as in a civil marriage, their marriages can later be sealed in the temple, with their children sealed to them as well. Worthy youngsters from the age of twelve can participate in vicarious baptisms for their dead ancestors, which Mormons understand to be invitations to those who died before having the opportunity to become Mormon; the invitations can be accepted or rejected. New converts must be worthy members for one year before participating in temple ordinances. All temple ordinances demand worthiness and a solid testimony of the Holy Ghost. We read in D & C 8 of the Holy Ghost’s spiritual gifts of revelation to Oliver Cowdery as scribe to Joseph Smith in the Book of Mormon translations, and in Moroni 10, a testimony of the Book of

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9 Originally responsible for missionary work and as assistants to the Apostles, the First and Second Quorums serve as General Authorities. With church expansion there are now eight quorums of Seventies presiding over the globe as Area Seventies.
Mormon’s spiritual gifts are always present to the followers, reinforcing faith and belief no matter the costs. We read from Matthew 14, 15 about the martyrdom of John the Baptist. Also, Jesus feeds thousands with a couple of fish and loaves of bread, after which he walks on water. Jesus confronts the Pharisees’ hypocrisy, heals the sick, and feeds another multitude. Upon parting, with tears in his eyes, the junior elder shared his testimony, a heartfelt expression of faith and knowledge in the truth of this church, its Book of Mormon and its prophets today. I offered a prayer of thanksgiving for all the time these missionaries have devoted to my learning about their church.

The elder’s testimony was beautifully poetic in its timing and synthesis of today’s lesson, which is the culmination of everything I have learned. Perhaps if an investigator can believe in the implausible biblical miracles of Jesus then it is only another leap of faith to believe in the ‘promise of Moroni’ – a testimony of the Book of Mormon. This book, with its prophet, apostles and priests, leaders and missionaries, and chapels and temples attended by active members at all levels, serves as witness to the restoration of the original covenant through Jesus Christ in these latter days.

**Word of Wisdom Boundary**

Typical investigators are asked to attend church and adhere to the Word of Wisdom in an effort to make them aware of what they are getting themselves into. During all fieldwork trips, I attended every Sunday’s Sacrament Services, went to Sunday school, and attended Relief Society meetings. Additionally, I joined in ward and stake conferences, and several General and Semi-Annual Conferences; youth activities, Institute, a baptism, and Family Home Evenings. In gratitude for the missionaries’ teaching expended on my behalf, I asked them how I could make a return. They obliged by challenging me to give up coffee for ten days, in the same way a new covert
would be required to do. So, I gave up coffee – for exactly ten days. As much as possible, I wanted to experience what life as a Mormon would require.

The most difficult of all requirements however, was the abstention from coffee, which is a Word of Wisdom prohibition, a covenant boundary, and an indicator of worthiness. The Word of Wisdom is repeated throughout this study as the boundary that trips people up. For the participants in this study, adherence to the Word of Wisdom is a non-negotiable doctrine, which is to say it is a significant marker of difference, or of chosenness. As one of the standards of the church, it is a requirement of worthiness to enter the temple. When I asked several participants why God cares about coffee, the suggestion generally was that, besides being bad for health, coffee is God’s test of obedience, which I have failed beyond ten days. Had I been an investigator on an existential quest perhaps I would have experienced the personal and emotional urgings of the spirit that accompanies the religious conversion; and having come to believe that my eternal life might be at stake, perhaps I would have jettisoned coffee and anything else standing between me and the covenant people. As it was instead an intellectual quest, which was satisfied as much as possible during our time together, I felt no compulsion to change my life. In other words, I did not want to cross any religious boundaries beyond the intellectual and the empathetic. As several missionaries expressed many people simply do not want to change their lives.

This project provided me with greater empathy for those investigators who come

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10 Field notes dated March 1, 2008. An unexpected realization attended my first cup of coffee after ten days. The aroma and the first sip brought tears of remembrance of childhood, fixing my father’s coffee with a teaspoon of sugar and milk after which I was given the first sip. At that moment, I realized that for us, early morning coffee was a family ritual. To this day, my four siblings and I carry on this tradition with our spouses, and have passed it on to our children. When I shared this story with the missionaries, they uttered a collective, drawn out response, “Oh . . .” No doubt, coffee as a ritual is a foreign notion to members whose families have never enjoyed it.
to embrace and live within the covenant boundaries of the Mormon life. Although my investigation of the church has for the past ten years been for research, I, too, have been an investigator, however unconventional, the fact of which I made clear to the mission president and the missionaries as well as all participants. However, that I could investigate the church without the intention of receiving a testimony was a point of significant curiosity for some members. Several of them mentioned it, but one stake high priest questioned me on several occasions despite my best efforts to explain my intentions: “How can you learn so much and not be touched by the spirit?” In other words, how could I resist, and not convert?

One of the features of doing research among the Mormons is realizing their certainty of the truth, which belongs only to them “in its fulness.” For these members, the truth is self-evident and, if the investigator is sincere in conversion motivation, the truth is accessible to the investigator as well. Apparently, my explanation as an ethnographer as investigator did not satisfy him how such a position was possible to negotiate. Apparently, one of my key participants provided a much more convincing instruction to this priest: that for Gayle to intend to convert would be like “going native” imperiling a project in social science. The high priest accepted that explanation and suggested once my project was complete, I would no longer have the research impediment to joining.11

One of the missionaries who instructed me asked if I concurred with him on the truth of the Book of Mormon, which I explained was beyond my capabilities as a researcher. Again, assuming sincere supplication, the veracity of the Book of Mormon

11 On more than one occasion, I was told, “You are a Mormon; you just don’t know it yet.”
is thought to be an inescapable truth by these Mormons. I found my narrow way by staying focused on my task learning as an ethnographer “apprentice.” They took me into apprenticeship well aware that any interest in their church is worthwhile, assuming the investigator is not of malintentions. Whether a potential investigator is interested out of curiosity, or admiration, in an existential crisis or alienated, or intellectually stimulated, their welcome and friendship in community is inviting, warm, and, as I know from doing research among converts, sometimes irresistible.

**Fruits of Instruction**

Having experienced the missionary lessons, there is a richer understanding of the comprehensiveness of the new and everlasting covenant restored. New investigators with the aid of the missionaries and the Holy Ghost assent to become among God’s chosen people, and by extension, among the disciples of Jesus Christ. By making new reciprocal covenants, converts are bound into stake communities where they perfect their families, conduct their temple work for deceased relatives and endure until the end. I am much more aware that the missionary-investigator relationship has the potential to be life transforming for both parties. These missionaries are among the nicest and most sincere young men who, along with the welcoming church members, embrace strangers into their community.

To be with the Mormons is to experience a very charismatic, magnetic group of people. They seem to be genuinely loving and caring people, and they are to live by example. It is not difficult to imagine being new in this country, perhaps without English, isolated and alone from a fractured family, encountering this community of saints and their invitation to belong. Such an invitation would appear extremely appealing, a place of refuge and safety, bringing purpose, order, discipline, and sobriety in an otherwise
hostile and chaotic world. And as a corollary, one might experience upward social mobility through connections in this community, as well as a chance at repairing their families, if not in the temporal realm, then in the eternal where temple sealings heal all displacements. Having done research among Jehovah’s Witnesses, the charisma is simply not the same. Witnesses do not exude the optimism for godly human potential even if Mormon earthly embodiment is probationary; instead, Witness premillennialism is dire as is that of some other competitors such as evangelicals. Nevertheless, both Witnesses and evangelicals provide ample competition for Mormons among the peoples of the Americas.

The transformative potential in Mormonism extends not only to converts, but to each member, every day. Mission in the FFLM potentially transforms the multi-cultural lives of converts into a new “master status” identity as Mormons and turns missionaries into the next generation of church leaders. For the active missionaries in this study, they can anticipate how their lives will have been changed by serving their missions. They have for examples their returned missionary family members, friends and church leaders whose lives have been role models. And they have the words of their prophets, many of whom have served. Gordon B. Hinckley made clear the results that can be expected of missionary service, had any of them been in doubt:

I know that our young men are under a great obligation to qualify themselves through education to fill positions of responsibility in the world. Their time is precious. But I do not hesitate to promise that the time spent in faithful and devoted service as a missionary declaring the Master will only add to their qualifications for positions of responsibility in the future. Regardless of the vocation they choose to pursue, they will be better qualified in their powers of expression, in their habits of industry, in the value they place on training, in the integrity of their lives and in their recognition of a higher source of strength and power than that which lies within their native capacity (Hinckley 1983).
Having served their missions and having been well served by their missions, the ideal and expected trajectory for a member's life, particularly among the emerging adult males, is to return honorably as the next generation of leaders in their stakes, and find their eternal mates to begin a family, get an education, go to the temple to redeem their family’s dead, and serve senior companion missions later in life.

**Anticipating LDS Adulthood**

The young men in this study are fairly decisive in what they anticipate will be their next steps following their mission service; the women are somewhat less sure. All eleven men who filled out questionnaires included education in their top three priorities. Nine ranked education as their first post-mission goal. Two ranked going to work as most important. Four men ranked marriage as their second priority and another three ranked it third, while marriage did not receive a ranking among four missionaries. However, when asked how their missions helped prepare them for their adult lives, all but one expressed having served a mission would help them especially in marriage, as well as in everything post-mission. For the women, post mission life goals include education, work, marriage, and travel more conversationally constructed than ranked by priority; however, all of them expect to get an education and raise a family in whatever order it happens. This combination of questions suggests that the missionaries generally see education and work as the highest priorities that will facilitate marriage and family as very important goals. Among men and women there are few who expressed a goal of traveling, which is not a priority at this time although all of them hope to serve missions later in life as seniors in the church doing whatever the church

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12 All data in this section is from elder questionnaires compiled April 5, 2008; sister questionnaires compiled June 28, 2008.
needs wherever the needs are, including education, proselytizing, and humanitarian work. For now, from their missionary manuals, they will have this axiom of guidance: “The most important of the Lord’s work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own homes,” (*Preach My Gospel*, 2004:3).

During the October 2009 Semi-annual Conference, Apostle M. Russell Ballard counseled fathers and sons, directing these comments to recently returned missionaries:

> The most important decision you will make in this life is the decision to marry the right girl in the temple! While no one should rush this significant decision, all returned missionaries should be working on it. Be where you can meet the right kind of friends. And go on dates. Hanging out is not the way, nor is it enough! Courting seems to be a lost art. Rediscover it. It really works! Ask your fathers—they know! Do not drift to the ways of the world. Rather, maintain the dignity and the Spirit you enjoyed on your mission. The Church will need your leadership in the future (Ballard 2009).

These young men expressed enthusiasm when asked if their missions served as preparation for marriage. One elder wrote, “For sure! You have to live with an assigned companion and are forced to get along and learn; be a better person.” Another wrote, “Yes, I have realized what I want for eternity …” Others said they were becoming “more mature;” more “experienced [and had] increased spirituality;” “learned to be more obedient and self-reliant;” “learned to reach agreements with others more easily;” and “growing a lot and learning valuable attributes to use later in life.” One elder expressed, “Yes, but only to the girls who are worth marrying, because growth comes with mission service.” “Yes, because girls in the church expect their husbands to be returned missionaries.” One elder new to the mission wrote, “Yes, girls love it when you

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13 This idea originated with Sara M. Patterson who writes on Mormon masculinity, and disaffiliation from the church (2010).
sacrifice and know how to work.” Another missionary wrote that having served a mission he wants to “raise his family in the gospel.”

All of the young men and women want their sons to serve missions; five elders and one sister said they would equally support sons and daughters alike. By this expectation, they will likely perpetuate the family missionary lineages of belief and service as a Mormon norm. Six men and two women said their emphasis for mission service would be on their sons, with daughters optional, according to their own desires. Only one elder said he would “not particularly” encourage daughters in service. One sister wrote “I want all of my children to understand the importance of missionary work and all my boys to understand their divine role as priesthood holders and following the commandment to serve and how great their life and other’s will be blessed because of it.”

These features of what the missionaries anticipate post-mission life are suggestive of what Tim Heaton (1987) calls the four C’s of Mormon families: chastity (meaning they follow the law of chastity); conjugality (the preference for marriage); children (intending to have and raise children) and chauvinism (suggested by their attitudes toward daughters serving missions). Although not specifically tested in this small sample, their post-mission intentions align at least in part. They already practice chastity, and while marriage and children remain to be seen, they are norms of Mormon adulthood, and most of these missionaries anticipate family life. But it is too early to tell how their household labor and authority will be distributed. It is notable though that all of these missionaries, men and women alike, subscribe to the church’s guidelines on gendered missionary service and see no reason for change, which could be a
chauvinistic attitude. As Apostle Thomas Monson advised in 1971, “We do not wish to create a program that would prevent them from finding . . . a proper companion in marriage, because that is their foremost responsibility if such is able to happen” (Embry 1998:174). At the same time, almost one-third said they would support daughters equally.

Through their church, as in their families, young Mormons “have been taught to view their mission as a test of their devotion to the Lord” (Peterson 2003:43). When asked how they would assess their missions to date, five expressed being very satisfied due to their obedience whether working hard, learning to the fullest, sharing the gospel or following mission rules. Five wrote feeling like their missions had been very successful so far due to personal growth. Four mentioned having obtained stronger testimonies as evidence their missions were successful. In all, these missionaries expressed having changed in ways that were profound and positive; four expressed specifically religious change—a “better relationship with Jesus Christ;” “understanding God more;” “learning how much more this church means to me;” and “more spiritual.” Practical changes included developing “maturity,” “responsibility,” and becoming “more outgoing.” A sister shared that the mission “broadened my perspective on other peoples’ understanding of things, of the gospel. So many different reasons for other perspectives’ that I didn’t know before.”

Although the General Authority would rather not present mission as a rite of passage, their narratives suggest the mission experience serves that purpose for some. “I’ve always thought that girls are born more mature. But it takes a mission to mature a boy. Boys—we’re not—we need the mission, we need the experiences, so afterwards
we’re ready to be a contributing member of society,” to which there was a round of assenting laughter from his peers. He went on, “Leave a boy, come back a man. In large part, they share in the sentiments of Paul’s letter to Timothy about his mission, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy: 7). Their assessments are not so much about numbers but about fulfilling their obligation honorably. Because, after all, missionaries can lead others by invitation to Christ, but only through the Holy Ghost can they be converted.

Successes notwithstanding, the missionaries approximate twenty percent of their ranks will go inactive upon return, meaning if they stay inactive they will not be available for leadership positions, may not raise families born in the covenant, and will not have children serve. Asked if men are disadvantaged in the church if they don’t serve the missionaries agreed they would not be; two examples came up, one elder’s bishop did not serve and another’s older brother chose a doctorate over a mission. Another said, there’s the church and then there’s the church culture. The church culture might not always be exactly in line with church teachings—the church is perfect, the members are not. So you might have a situation where you’re frowned upon for not serving a mission, because, like, ‘what did he do that he can’t serve?’ But it may only be a personal decision. So, you’ll get different opinions from different people, but it [not serving a mission] doesn’t mean you can’t serve [in another capacity].

In this reckoning, mission service is church culture. “The emphasis upon missionary service is so great that rank and file members easily assume serving a mission, like baptism and temple endowment, is an indispensable step toward exaltation” but in fact, missionary service is not a saving ordinance as are baptism or

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14 Focus group transcript dated April 5, 2008.

15 Focus group transcript dated April 5, 2008.
temple endowments (Peterson 2003:43). Mission service may not be a saving ordinance, but it is a divine imperative, a commandment, a covenant responsibility, and a “perfecting” mechanism necessary to adulthood in the Church.

That young Mormons are socialized into missionary families provides a perpetual source of potential international actors who return to build families of the next generation of missionaries, revitalize and lead their congregations, keeping the chain of memory going. To be born into this religion in lineages of missionaries is to be born into a reference group or a “master status” – to be born into an ethnicity with a specific cultural habitus (May 2001). As the ultimate reference group, to be the chosen people, a covenant people, they dare not commit apostasy in this final dispensation, as have all other dispensational chosen people. Even though these covenant people have strict parameters for belonging, belief, and behavior, they are still encouraged to think and be responsible – to be self-reliant, to be adaptive and change, especially their thinking, as necessary. For examples, the sister in the MTC telling herself to “step up” and learn ASL; those missionaries asking for pre-mission inspiration; and the ward mission leader seeking an answer for how to replace tracting as a method for finding the elect are all examples of how Mormons seek their solutions through prayer and personal revelation, which they understand to be entirely rational.

Once released from their missions, assuming these missionaries will have completed service and ‘returned with honor,’ they can expect callings or leadership roles within the units of the stakes. Stakes are the next plausibility structure where Mormons perfect themselves and each other. “Serving a mission is highly regarded as a training ground for future church service” (Taber 1993:245). Where the expected
outcomes for women seem less assured than for the men, by the end of honorable service the women have acted on familial and spiritual inspiration to serve. Likewise, the elders have been similarly inspired, but their service is obligatory, which they trust as a necessary rite of passage into adulthood and church leadership, raising the next generation of missionaries.

Together these three chapters on active missionary service in the FFLM demonstrate how Mormons undertake mission – or proclaim the gospel. Missionaries and mission leaders arrive mostly from the MCR, along with converts from Latin America and the Caribbean. Latinos are serving as leaders in the mission, gradually trickling up into higher positions fulfilling Paul's biblical injunctions that all be “one in Christ.” Mission is demonstrated as a plausibility structure of the church in the restoration of the sacred canopy, which is the ancient covenant. The missionaries' narratives and their leaders' participation demonstrate the features of being a covenant people, based on their worthiness and adherence to the covenant requirements for participation in Mormon mission. Only a selective group of young Mormons qualifies for missionary service, and only about one-third of those age-eligible actually serve. The messages for missionaries by their General Authorities, in their training manuals, and *Preach My Gospel* manual are replete with 'covenant people' terminology.

The active missionaries and their leaders speak of making and keeping covenants more than they speak of being a covenant people. This is indicative of the way in which Mormons construct several meanings for one term. “Covenant” provides a structure of collective identity and a mobilization of belief and service, as well as a contract with God. Although for Berger the sacred canopy is “taken-for-granted,” the
LDS would deny that in favor of the covenant as a “given,” which is to say, a gift. The covenant norms restored in Mormonism result from the world-construction process beginning with the Heavenly Father’s revelation calling a new covenant people to remember and uphold the covenant as people of old had failed or forgotten to do.

Every dispensation has had present the covenant, which is to say the covenant idea is embedded in the western religious tradition. Now restored, this great news was externalized (man’s outpouring of human activity) by Joseph Smith and the early missionary followers as they spread the story of the ancient covenant in the Americas. This revealed covenant world is maintained by remembrance, which means making reciprocal covenants by enacting the demands of covenant discipleship.

We [Latter-day Saints], like Israel of old, also find security in our covenant relationship with God, finding answers to the trials placed upon us, and therefore find our place in the world. Moreover, thanks to the covenant, we understand that anyone can have the same understanding and the same relationship. . . .” (Belnap 2009:34).

This covenant understanding requires missionary work to continually recapitulate the new and everlasting covenant, perfecting saints in stakes and families, and baptizing the dead; these are the three plausibility structures of the church. All of this work – missionary, stake, and temple – recalls and enacts the Mormon family lineages of belief. In their stakes, where they “perfect” each other, they call one another “brother” and “sister.” Through these religious kinship relationships, “the normativity of collective memory is reinforced by the fact of the group’s defining itself, objectively and subjectively, as a lineage of belief” (Hervieu-Léger 2000:125, emphasis in the original). Adding new members and retaining them establish new stakes in Zion. LDS sociologist Armand Mauss is emphatic about the relationship between the priesthood and stakes,
which Stewart quotes. “In order to form new stakes you have to have a certain number of active priesthood holders. If we cannot hold our new male converts around long enough to get the Melchizedek priesthood, we cannot create new stakes” (Stewart 2007:416). As returned missionaries, along with newly converted priesthood holders, they will become the local leaders of the stakes, as well as the heads of their future families to which we turn in the following chapters.
CHAPTER 10
RETURNED MISSIONARIES’ BACKGROUND

Celebrating fifty years, the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission and its stakes have been increasing and perfecting the saints of south Florida. The ecclesiastical institution for gathering the expanding membership, much like a Catholic diocese, is called the ‘stake in Zion’ – an imagery that recalls for Mormons the prophecy of Isaiah. As membership gathers in the stakes, members must be retained, which is to say members must be ‘perfected’ to promote activity and retention, avoiding inactivity and apostasy.

Within the FFLM stakes are over 27,000 Latter-day Saints, many of whom have migrated from throughout the Americas. The four stakes in this study, the Pompano Beach Stake, Fort Lauderdale Stake, Miami Lakes Stake, and Miami Florida South Stake contain a multi-cultural membership guided by a diverse local leadership organized under the priesthood.¹ Included in this membership are the research participants who, in this chapter and the next two, are returned missionaries (RMs). Having ‘returned with honor’ they are a reference group for aspiring missionaries and are affectionately identified as RMs. All of them labored to increase membership throughout the Americas, including the FFLM, helping establish stakes in Zion to perfect the saints.

In this chapter, the stakes are considered as the second plausibility structure, the local institution that is charged with perfecting its members for maximum retention and expansion. Turning to this case study, the research participants include twenty-five returned missionaries who served proselytizing missions throughout the Americas, as early as 1960 and as recently as 2006, just as fieldwork was commencing. Their

¹ Since this research was conducted, the Stuart Stake has been added to the FFLM as of fall 2011.
narratives, best organized into a tri-part conversation, include first, their predispositions to serve: family missionary lineages of belief and motivations to serve. The second part of their narratives is retrospectives of active mission service in the Americas, included in Chapter 11. The third part, included in Chapters 12 and 13, provide their post-mission lives as RMs: working toward perfecting saints in family life; and as local leaders in Chapter 13.

**Stakes in Zion as a Plausibility Structure**

The Mormon stake, like Mormon mission, is a plausibility structure, a normative institution upon which the church depends for its traditions, which in turn shape the members' values and identity. “Plausibility structures function to inculcate and maintain adherence to a particular belief system, reinforce commitment to group norms of conduct, unifying the ranks in a common cause, and insulate against the often dispiriting antagonism and incredulity of the outside world” (Shepherd and Shepherd 2001:173-174). Where mission dates to the mandate of Jesus Christ undertaken by Paul, and reinforced by the Prophet Joseph Smith, Mormons reach back to Isaiah for the prophecy of their stakes in Zion. Using Isaiah’s imagery, Jesus Christ instructed the Nephites in the organization of stakes and he “promised to reveal to them his new covenant of priestly sacrifices and ordinances, including those of the temple” (Albrecht 1992:1412). In Isaiah, the tent was held up by stakes, and as people gathered in the tent, the cords were expanded to make the tent larger. The tent, like a canopy, provided all the protection possible from the elements and marauders. Stakes, along with missions, are among the oldest institutional structures in the church. They are the location of the “gathering of the Saints” even as they are now scattered all over the world (Shipps 2000d:258-277). Beginning as early as February 1831 in Kirtland, the
Lord sent ten revelations\(^2\) using the Isaiah tent imagery by which Joseph Smith employed “an ancient figure with latter-day implications” (Hall 2002:69).

The earliest stakes in Mormonism were short lived, but Isaiah’s prophecy was persistent. The first stake was established in Kirtland, Ohio, February 17, 1834 pursuant to another revelation. Although the stake in Kirtland presided over by president Joseph Smith was later abandoned, a new stake in Clay County, Missouri was organized in 1834, under a separate stake presidency and high council (Allen and Leonard 1976:79). Following the exodus, LDS leadership organized the Great Basin what they believed to be the kingdom of God on earth around the future temple’s site. They designated the area the “Salt Lake Stake of Zion” where “Zion’s tent needs the support of stakes . . .” (Shipps, May, and May 1994:293). “Within its perimeter all Saints were sequestered, leaving outside only non-Mormons, persons the Saints called “Gentiles”” (296). The first ward, the Sugar House Ward, was organized under the Salt Lake Stake on April 24, 1854. The term ‘ward’ derived from Nauvoo’s municipal districts (302). This organization of “multilevel” congregations – subordinate wards and branches – within the larger stake congregation remains today (296).

In the Americas, the first stake in Mexico was organized in Chihuahua in 1895 among the American colonizers but it would be 1961 before a second stake in Mexico City was established. And then, between 1961 and 1974, stakes increased at 1.44 per year followed by seventeen in 1975 alone (Vasquez in Tullis 1978:126). The Mormons “gauge the growth of the Church in any [mission] region by the establishment of stakes”

By January 1, 2011 there were 2,896 stakes worldwide with a majority 2,475 stakes located in the Americas including the four stakes in the FFLM.

President Ezra Taft Benson called the stake “a miniature Church.” He instructed, “The prophets likened latter-day Zion to a great tent encompassing the earth. That tent was supported by cords fastened to stakes. Those stakes, of course, are various geographical organizations spread out over the earth. Presently, Israel is being gathered to the various stakes of Zion” (Benson 1991). Gathering the saints in stakes through conversions and baptisms is the work of the missions. The missions function best within ‘centers of strength’ in cities large enough to support sufficient numbers of conversions for serving priesthood leadership capacities in the stakes and its wards, branches, and families. In small isolated towns Mormon families would languish in the absence of stake communities. Further, the Church resources of mission and human capital are best maximized in urban hubs. As a miniature church, the stake president is fully responsible for the everyday perfection of the saints, supervising all of the ward bishops, and disciplining all of its members. The stakes are the location of local ecclesiastical bureaucracy, where every day spirituality is routinized, rationalized, organized, and standardized around the world according to correlated church programs. Stakes are the local nexus where the priesthood leadership provides ministry to members and their families, connecting the local wards with Salt Lake City. This is to say the entire global Mormon community is organized into the covenant by linkages, or lineages of families organized in stakes. The president continued,

Here we see the major purpose of stakes. They are organized to assist parents who have “children in Zion” to teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ and administer the ordinances of salvation. Stakes are formed to perfect the Saints, and that development begins in the home with effective gospel instruction. Only
after a stake is organized may the full Church program be authorized for the benefit of the members (Benson 1991).

Thanks to successful missionary work, the increasing numbers of new members are organized by divine design through Isaiah. In this way, today’s stakes function similarly – they are the center of gathering and protection for the members, and they are enlarged as new members convert into this chosen covenant people. While stakes are the normative Mormon ecclesiastical regional unit, the institution is entirely dependent upon an active membership and voluntary leadership. And, the leadership manual instructs that members and their families cannot progress without the organization of the Church nor can the stakes survive without its members and leaders. This is to say that the stakes and the member families are interdependent. Five of the participants in this study grew up in early Latin American areas of the Church where stakes were just forming, while the majority came of age in American stakes. But given the dynamics of local leadership and membership expansion and contraction, while stakes are an institution their geographic boundaries are subject to change as we see in the FFLM.

Where growth is sustained, together the congregations of branches and wards make up the stakes, all of which are combined in the mission that overlay the stakes. As the church expands, the units are reorganized and divided to keep their sizes manageable for the local leaders; a ward is typically less than 700 members. Fully mature, the mission consists of a mission president and two counselors responsible for the administration of missionaries within the stake. The stake leadership consists of a

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3 Glenn L. Pace (2004) reports in Ghana where independent branches popped up before the Africans were eligible for the priesthood. This phenomenon was also seen in Nigeria and Ghana where “saints” attempted to make a church without the sanction of Salt Lake City prior to the abolition of the priesthood ban (Allen 1992). Once the priesthood ban was lifted, the official church had to take over and clean up the errors and omissions.
president and two counselors with a high priest counsel of twelve who conduct all local ecclesiastical affairs of the congregations. The wards are led by a bishop and two counselors; the branch is led by a president and two counselors. While the branch and ward leaders answer to the stake president, the mission presidents and stakes presidents are considered leaders of equal position. All stake and mission leaders answer to the Area Authorities (regional administrative leaders) who answer to the General Authorities in Salt Lake City. As the center of strength, as well as the temporal and spiritual boundaries of the covenant community, the stakes provide the necessary linkages to the office of the prophet, connecting families on the Americas periphery to the global ecclesiastical center through local leadership.

Perfection in this life began first in their families of origin, growing up under the watchful eye of stake leadership and the ward bishops, all of whom encouraged missionary service. The stakes in Zion provide the leadership structure and support for lineages of belief perpetuated through the wards and branches, and families and missionaries. Mormon perfection includes all spiritual and temporal human activities that seek to develop the attributes of God, which advance the Mormons in eternal progression, and are modeled in the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. These activities are best enacted through the full Church program. The South Florida metropolitan area is a center of strength, as evidenced by dynamic stake leadership and membership. The leadership in these four FFLM stakes, like stakes around the world, is often populated by returned missionaries who came from families of missionaries or converted and began their own.
Predisposition: Becoming a Missionary

Family Missionary Tradition

As consistent with the active missionaries in the prior chapters, these returned missionaries are also from families of Mormon missionaries and a few are adult converts age-eligible to serve. This snowball sample of twenty-five returned missionaries includes six women. With the exception of the mission president who is one RM in this group, the other twenty-four are permanent residents of the FFLM, the majority residing in the Fort Lauderdale Stake, with the remainder south to the Miami Lakes and Homestead Stakes. Thirteen RMs were born into highly congruent Anglo American LDS homes from the Intermountain area. Of the thirteen, at least six date back several generations to Mormon pioneers; among those with family followers of Joseph Smith, one family reaches back to the Mexican colonies as descendants of Parley Pratt, and another is in the Hyrum Smith lineage by marriage. Two mentioned relatives having converted in the British and Scandinavian missions. Another twelve returned missionaries, ten of whom originated in Latin America or the Caribbean, were converts or born to convert parents. Only six of the RMs grew up in the South Florida area, four of whom are Hispanic. Whether born under the covenant in missionary families or converted to Mormonism starting a new missionary lineage, all but two missionaries enjoyed family emotional support, most benefited from some parental financial support, and most had worked saving some if not all the money for their missions. Conversion notwithstanding, missionary service is a given, and is quickly adopted as a normative family expectation.

Ten out of the thirteen Anglo American families had a family missionary tradition embedded, where family members most importantly served as a reference group the
RMs in this study. Counting themselves, at least five families had three generations of missionaries back to grandfathers. Of these five, four had great-grandfathers serve and one family had two great-grandmother missionaries. More recently, seven fathers had served proselyting missions, along with nearly fifty brothers and sisters RMs in these families of origin.⁴ “My family was always involved in mission work. I always knew that I wanted to go on a mission – that’s just what we do,” was the explanation of one RM whose Grandfather Pratt was the president of the Mexico Mission.⁵ To carry on this lineage of missionary service is to be a link in the chain of memory, of what Hervieu-Léger (2000) calls lineages of belief. Lana, born LDS in Utah and called to southern-most Argentina (1997-98), recalled family support, her peers, and her Patriarchal Blessing, a unique feature of Mormonism and her bishop’s opposition.

I started thinking about it when I was twelve and my brother went on his mission and I admired him so much, I decided I’m going on a mission. I always said that. I think it was a little novel at the time. But there were four or five of us close friends and we all went at the same time. And, the Patriarchal Blessing I got when I was sixteen mentioned something about a mission, so that was like a confirmation. I always knew, and I could feel it. Heavenly Father put a desire into my heart from an early age. But my bishop said, “If a guy comes along, I want you to get married.” Finally, the last interview I had with the stake president, he really confirmed it.⁶

Lana’s bishop’s emphasis on marriage over mission is the expectation of the leadership of the Church among most of the members in this study. The bishop’s emphasis was confirmed by Sofia who converted in Argentina when she approached

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⁴ Only two RMs mentioned a sibling each who had become inactive in one case, and entirely disaffiliated in the other. Interview transcripts respectively, RSD and RMM, dated June 10, 2007 and June 25, 2008.

⁵ Interview transcript, RMH, dated June 11, 2007.

⁶ Interview transcript, RSD, June 10, 2007.
him about serving.⁷ While women are welcome in the mission field, they are not necessarily encouraged, and there is no expectation for them to serve missions. They are however, expected to marry and start a family “if a guy comes along,” which for Lana didn’t happen. To maintain the window of marriage opportunity, their eligible mission age is delayed until twenty-one, where the men begin at nineteen. If women were also allowed to serve at nineteen, there is a general notion that more women would serve, which would be non-normative at the time of this writing.⁸ Conversely, her best friend, Janelle, avoided the bishop trap despite a serious relationship. “I felt a spiritual prompting and that was what I went on; and right after that [prompting] I met Ed. And we started dating quite seriously and felt that this could be a long-term relationship, but I still felt the mission was the correct thing to do. Ed was very enthusiastic because he had gone.”⁹ Returning also from Argentina (1997-98), she and Ed married after returning to BYU, but she acknowledged that typically her case would have called for marriage in lieu of service. Janelle’s decision and Ed’s support together trumped the standard formula for young women, which is to say that there is some variance in the dispositions of local bishops.

Although a fourth generation member of the church, Patty who was called to Bogota (1974-76), and her siblings were the first to serve other than one distant uncle. In addition to her parental support, she said it was a sister missionary who influenced her:

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⁷ Interview transcript, RSM, dated June 25, 2008.

⁸ An October 6, 2012 announcement by the Prophet during General Conference changed the age of service for women to 19 and men to 18.

When I was a little girl, I was eight sitting in a sacrament meeting, and a lady was coming to church, she was a missionary coming to give her report and I was just so... I really enjoyed it. I remember going home and telling my mother than I wanted to be a missionary. My dad encouraged me to do it, because my dad was in the service so he never served a mission. The gospel was taught in our home and it was lived in our home, and my parents were very exemplary of the things they were teaching us. And both were very much supportive of my mission.  

Although Norm’s family was always active, he was the first to serve, which he attributes to his religion course at Brigham Young University. “That was a very important year for me, because my religion classes had a very deep impact on me. That was the time I took the gospel much more seriously and personally than I might have taken it during any previous time... growing in the desire to serve a mission.\(^\text{11}\) After his mission and BYU, this RM went on to a Harvard PhD and professorship in political science, is an expert in ancient biblical texts and the Book of Mormon, and a mission president.

A “sixth generation American,” Christian was inspired to serve by RM’s in his local ward, and by family missionary stories. His father served in the Southern States Mission in the late 1940s and his four brothers served, one in the combined Central American mission in Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua, another in Recife, Brazil, and two state-side: San Antonio and Rochester, New York. His parents have undertaken a senior mission to Anchorage, Alaska. But most touching were the stories of his grandfather who served in Prussia “without purse or scrip,” which was the early method of LDS missionary work in the model of Paul and Barnabas.\(^\text{12}\) Taking no money

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\(^{10}\) Interview transcript, RSH, dated June 7, 2007.  
\(^{11}\) Interview transcript, RMR, dated February 27, 2008.  
\(^{12}\) Interview transcript, RMA, dated February 25, 2008.
and no literature, missionaries relied entirely on God and the community for sustenance and preaching inspiration. Christian labored in Winnipeg, Manitoba among complacent Methodists and Catholics; there were not the dramatic and emotive conversion stories he has experienced among Latino members as president in his FFLM stake.

Upon recent return from Peru (2004-06), Alex told me in addition to his father, his oldest sister served, and although their missionary tradition is not deep, “you just grow up thinking you’ll go on a mission.” He provided a litany of personal and spiritual motivations that demonstrate a conflation of reasons for mission service, which is not uncommon. Further, everything Alex listed accumulates toward the responsible exercise of agency and the growth of a testimony, yielding the desire to serve God.

My dad said it will help you become more responsible; will help in your school work, and in all your life. You hear stories about missionaries and I just knew I was going to go. I was a lazy teenager, didn’t get my homework done, played computer games. One of my original desires to go was to become more responsible – one of my goals. I didn’t have a very deep knowledge of the scriptures, but I had a strong testimony. I read the Book of Mormon and I knew it was true, and growing up in the church, I knew it was true. I wanted to be able to serve God.13

This formula is a common Mormon narrative. Guided by his father’s Mexico experience, combined with a rational decision and the power of the testimony, Alex arrived at a Pauline desire to serve God’s will. By the second generation, this young man had internalized the Mormon missionary master status based on his father’s model of the reference group and the church’s program of “anticipatory socialization.” As he went from baptism to deacon to teacher and then priest, his father instructed that each of those stages “prepares you to go out to share the gospel – Family Home Evening

then was Thursday, church every Sunday, and Scouting put gospel principles into practice. All the good male role models add to the [missionary] preparation.14

Another uniquely Mormon missionary narrative is the desire to marry an RM as a motivation for mission service. For two couples, all four of whom served missions, the desire to marry a returned missionary helped to inspire the decision to serve. Dean, returned from Uruguay (1960-63) said, “I think another secondary thing was the girl I was interested in probably hoped to marry an RM.” To which his wife Victoria (Argentina 1961-63) heartily replied, “I wouldn't have married you had you not been [an RM]! I think it is such a part of the expectation and our self-identity to be an RM. That was compelling to me.”15 Coming from a long family of missionaries, Clay grew up planning to serve and was called to Bolivia (1971-73): “It is just part and parcel of who we are.” But, unlike most Mormon men, he inverted the marriageability expectation: “I wanted to marry a returned missionary sister someday, these are the best, right here (patting his wife’s shoulder). So, it was very definitely a factor in our relationship, I wanted to marry a woman who had been on a mission,” which was match-made by his sister who had also served with Patty (Colombia 1974-76), Clay’s wife.16

First Generation Missionaries

Of the twelve RMs who were converts or the first in their converted families to serve, in the absence of a long family tradition, they quickly learned the importance of the Church programs and leadership to active families. Converted families who remain active quickly appropriate the missionary tradition, by starting new family lineages of

14 Interview transcript, RMM, dated June 25, 2008.
16 Interview transcript, RMH, dated June 11, 2007.
service. Orson, assigned to a Spanish-speaking mission in Las Vegas (2004-06) discussed growing up in a Hispanic ward in the FFLM, where his family quickly internalized mission.

My peer group was ten to fifteen; maybe four of us served. But we were in a Hispanic ward; it wasn’t as strong as the American wards, because we members were new. A lot of people had become not so active. I’ve never met a family that was active that didn’t support mission service. . . . A mission is a commandment of God. I was excited because my brother had served. With my family, they expected me to go. If I would have chosen not to go, they would have been disappointed I think, because they would have thought that I didn’t understand why they wanted me to serve.17

Horacio, a convert who grew up in the FFLM and first to serve in his family, called to Guatemala (2003-2004). He recalled asking the RMs to tell of their testimonies.

[Their testimonies] added to the desire and I wanted to fulfill this big dream. When I got my letter, I had called my mother and when we read the letter – it was to Guatemala. Aunts and uncles were against going on a mission, giving up two years, school, money, until they heard I was going to our country, which was a big change of heart!18

After Horacio, his only brother was serving in California.

Hector’s story of being called to Paraguay 1979-81, came after his recent conversion in the FFLM. Hearing the prophet speak in the General Conference gave rise to the quintessential Mormon testimony and the obedience it engenders:

Pres. Kimball got up to speak, the very last presentation of the last session of the Sunday general conference. When he got up, I had a burning feeling inside that this was a prophet of God. I didn’t question it, I knew it and I literally sat up in my chair, and I knew, this man is a prophet of God, I’d better do everything he tells me to do. He told me to go on a mission, so there was no question in my mind I was going on a mission.19

18 Transcript interview, RME, dated June 17, 2007.
19 Transcript interview, RMM, dated
Converting in Brazil where the church was young, Vincent noted there was neither a returned missionary pattern in the Church nor in the families, nor was there a leadership expectation of service. One of the two sources of influence on missionary work came from the missionaries who had converted his family, whom he admired, but they had gone home. And the second source was Primary. At the time of his conversion, he said, I joined the age group in what we call Primary, so I went to Primary and I learned all the fundamentals of the church and obviously about the teachings about the missionary work to the kids and that allows you to develop that feeling."

Because there was no pre-existent tradition, there were at that time no first hand stories or recollections in Portuguese of the missionary experience. He continued,

So, everything was a book, a history, or a translation of someone’s experience. Even the missionaries who were serving – the majority of them were not native – they were not Brazilians. I don’t remember an RM that lived in my stake. My father paid for my entire mission [Brazil 1979-81]. There was a lack of knowledge and incentive from the leadership in how to prepare.20

Sandra, a convert in Colombia who served in her home country (1981-82), recalled attending Catholic school, which set her apart as an example of what it is to be a Mormon. The experience of being the “other” was nevertheless a source of spiritual reassurance that her choices were the right thing to do.

Well, being the only Mormon in my Catholic school, my cousins and everyone, they cover for you; ‘she doesn’t drink coffee or alcohol.’ Or talking to somebody about your standards, ‘be careful she is a Mormon’ – and that makes you a missionary right there! When you know in your heart you are doing is for sure what your Heavenly Father would love for you to do, to try to teach other people that what you’re doing is the right thing. About the Book of Mormon, you like to share it.21

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Testimonies for Service

As most of these RMs discussed having acquired a testimony prior to service, there were occasions when the testimony came dramatically in the nick of time, at the Language Training Mission (LTM for older RMs) or its successor institution, the Missionary Training Center (MTC). Clay from a long pioneer lineage of missionary service was surprised to find himself questioning the strength of his own testimony. During the first two weeks of LTM training, he fasted, prayed fervently, studied and prayed, “I was really struggling with whether I felt I had a testimony that I could tell other people about.” And then, after a few days, “I was reading the Book of Mormon, the words on the page seemed to just jump off the page at me – as if the passages I was reading was God speaking to me – this was the word of God, not something someone had made up.” Everything else fell into place. “That was my testimony, my witness that I knew then that those were God’s words and Joseph Smith didn’t write them. . . . To get that spiritual conviction that I was doing the right thing; that was really what I got out of the LTM.”

Patty, his wife, with four LDS generations in her family, recalled reconsidering her mission during her LTM:

I do remember, in fact at one point, going to see the branch president in the LTM telling him I really think I didn’t made the right decision, and telling him that I should go home. He said he would support whatever I decided. But he counseled with me, talked to me about my family, asked me what my family situation was and if I had a supportive family; did I have a very active family.

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23 Interview transcript, RSH, dated June 11, 2007
If her family was supportive, and she was prayerful, then she would have to be introspective and examine her own relationship with God. He persisted in asking,

I understand you believe in prayer, but what is your relationship like with Heavenly Father?” We talked about that at length. He challenged me to work on that for a week or two, counseled me on things I could do, and he said come back and see me and if you want to go home, I’ll let you go home. It was a turning point for me. I felt like that was the point more than ever in my life that I developed a relationship with Heavenly Father. He encouraged me to stay and stick with it.24

Reynaldo, a youngster from Ecuador, having immigrated to the FFLM and converted with his family, was new to the Church. He decided to go on a mission (assignment Spanish-speaking Independence, Missouri 2003-05) because he was afraid he would regret it if he didn’t. But he didn’t yet have a testimony, and he was feeling quite anxious about it. He spoke of his MTC experience; he took the rational Mormon approach to finding divine inspiration. And he prefaced it by saying, “Gayle I want to tell you the whole story,” which is included here:

The way I found out if the church was true was when I was in the MTC. One night I was sitting at the table, all my friends were sleeping and I turned on the little light. I sat down at my desk, opened the scriptures and I said, ‘Ok, Lord, I’m not totally sure if these things are true. I know I’m going to have to talk about these things so I need to find out if the scriptures, the Book of Mormon is true because I do not know. If I’m going to go share about this you have to let me know because if I don’t feel comfortable I won’t be able to tell my feelings.’ The first night nothing happened. The first week it didn’t happen. I did this for three weeks! About three days before I was to leave – which was a short time to decide if I have to go home or to the mission if I did not receive a confirmation – three days before the mission, I did it again. Everyone was sleeping, I turned on the little light on my desk and I started reading again. While I was reading, I was normal, just reading the Book, and all of a sudden, tears started coming out of my face. And I said, ‘Wait, why am I crying if I don’t have the desire to go on the mission? And then I just right there knew that these things were true. At that moment I knew that it was a true work that I have to do it. And it was very important for me to know. It really was true; I was reading the Book of Mormon, I knew already about the Bible, and I was reading and tears came for no reason.

And so then I knew for myself that I needed to do it. I knew definitely it was from the Lord, two confirmations: that the Book of Mormon is true; and I am to serve the mission. Like, I can see everything is planned by him. Everything is just set up. He let me know everything — that I was called to go to Zion [Independence, Missouri].

Testimonies are a very particular religious experience in the life of a Mormon. Not a statement of belief, they are rather the divine confirmation of truth. Because of their belief in ongoing or continuous revelation, they expect to petition the Heavenly Father in prayer and have those prayers answered by the ‘still, small voice’ or a burning, or a feeling that is visceral. But the reassurance from the Holy Ghost will be entirely unique to their singular experience, despite contours of confirmation in unique Mormon orthodoxy: the Book of Mormon is true, the Prophet is of God, and this restored Church is true, the only true Church. Some missionaries had enjoyed strong, mature testimonies all their lives. For others, testimonies that were partial, in question, or in need of strengthening would be considered immature testimonies. While longings for a strong, secure testimony were the source of some anxiety for those who discussed their particular experiences, the testimonies came just in time for their service, which increased their power. It is one thing to have a testimony — it is quite another to have the personal revelation arrive with such powerful synchronicity.

For Mormons, such narratives provide evidence of the Holy Ghost’s reassurance that they alone hold the truth. The crucible of the LTM/MTC is where these defining moments often occur. This is not to say that any of these missionaries called these defining moment “crises of faith.” Instead, these were moments of confirmation for what they had known their whole lives to be true. Janelle, who served in Argentina (1997-98)

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said, “That’s the whole point of the MTC experience; to help you figure out what your own testimony is about. And clarify your motivations.”

Since the raising of the bar in 2003, local leaders are encouraged to be more discerning and selective regarding the maturity of testimonies possessed by missionary applicants. Apostle Ballard asserted, “This isn’t a time for spiritual weaklings. We cannot send you on a mission to be reactivated, or to receive a testimony. We just don’t have time for that” (Ballard 2002). Although missionaries never say they went on a mission without a testimony, it is a common thread among missionaries across the decades to say the mission made their testimonies stronger and for many was a rite of passage or a coming of age transition to adulthood. However, all Mormons are in agreement: no missionary will be effective in the field without a strong testimony. Therefore, the LDS are encouraged to start sharing their testimonies from an early age during the monthly Fast and Testimony Sundays. Shared testimonies validate and strengthen testimonies for all as the verbal feature of their communal identity; they serve as linkages of belief in the chains of memory.

Raised in active families, half of which have deep lineages of Mormon missionaries, these twenty-five participants left the LTM or MTC (in most cases), disciplined, armed with a testimony, and trained in language. Most of the recollections of motivations are an amalgam of Mormon family, peers, RMs and uniquely Mormon spiritual experiences or reasons to serve; only a few mentioned Pauline motivations. Nevertheless, like Paul, these missionaries felt privileged to have been called and set apart. In the Mormon case, these callings are from the prophet of God, who by divine

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inspiration assigned their missions. Some saw the hand of the Lord directly in their callings. Christian laughingly recalled that the Heavenly Father knew better than to call him to a Spanish-speaking mission, sending him instead to Canada.27

Dispatched to missions all over the Americas, they encountered peoples of all ages, socio-economic classes, and ethnicities, the topics of Chapter 11. Mobilized to recruit new converts, missionaries were charged with universalizing the particular restored covenant. Acting as a reference group with a master status, this is to say, they were faced with the issues of cultural encounter, leadership development, and establishing new family lineages of Mormons. Missionaries labored in sub-zero conditions from Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego, Argentina, to Winnipeg, Manitoba. Elders served among the indigenous or “Lamanites” and recruited mostly nominal Catholics into Mormonism. Their recollections of mission service provide insight into their capacities as the next generation of leaders in the FFLM.

27 Interview transcript, RMA dated June 24, 2008.
CHAPTER 11
STAKES IN ZION: RECALLING MISSIONS IN THE AMERICAS

Returned missionaries (RMs) have a special status in the church, having often served with valor in exotic places. The RM participants in this study remember their missionary service as fundamentally transformative of everyone involved. It was their intention to foment religious change in other peoples’ lives, converting them into Mormonism, which is the topic of this chapter. What was less anticipated were the profound changes that forged them into the next generation of adult leaders in their congregations, and the extent to which missionary service would inform their lives as parents, establishing their own lineages of missionaries in their children. Departing for proselytizing mission fields, some of them immediately encountered insufficient local leadership in nascent congregations throughout the Americas. Missionaries often served as local leaders, helping to pioneer the formation of new branches, wards, and stakes. Local (native) leadership maturation is a function of successful acculturation into the LDS covenant and learning the church programs, all of which also facilitate their retention as they serve callings. Internalizing the covenant demands of the new Mormon way of life, demonstrates the difficulties of universalizing a particular covenant, asking for people to make wholesale life changes.

In these narratives, there were the inevitable and inherently problematic interactions between cultures in religious switching. Where acculturation is successful, retentions are more likely, especially if families convert intact. Across numerous cultural ethnicities in the Americas, of particular interest are two groups. The ‘Lamanites’ are those who Mormons believe to be of ancient Israelite descent in the Americas, prophesied to become Mormon, and who are known to everyone else as indigenous
Americans. The second group is Roman Catholic, mostly nominally affiliated, from which the vast majority of converts come. In both cases, among indigenous and Catholic, potential converts are in recognizable ethnic family lineages. This is to say that as proselytizing missionaries invite new members into the covenant, there exists the possible consequence of rupturing their existing lineages because of a conversion. In some cases these fractures are not healed, and family fractures can work against retention of new members. Therefore, it is the missionaries’ hope that individuals and families together will join, and successfully integrate into Mormonism to become the next generation of local leaders and missionary families.

**Pioneering in Latin America**

Narratives from returned missionaries who served in the early days of church establishment in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, and Uruguay found themselves immersed in pioneering as well as proselytizing. Although South America was opened for missionary work in Argentina 1925 to serve European populations, it was not until post-World War II that Mormons went en masse inspired by the global visions of Presidents David O. McKay (1951-1970) and Spencer W. Kimball (1973-1985). Entering the global scene, early mission problems were inevitable: over-achieving missionary competition, quotas and incentives, the desperation of the “baseball baptisms” program recruiting children, and running headlong into the African priesthood prohibition (Prince and Wright 2005:227-255; 60-105). Nevertheless, tens of thousands of conversions were authentic preparing the mission field for an improving harvest every year. President McKay called for a ‘new era’ in missionary work where ‘every member [is to be] a missionary’ and President Kimball’s leadership integrated the priesthood, both of which had implications for missions in the Americas. Inasmuch as their families
were often from the Mormon pioneer background, several of the RMs discussed the challenges of setting up new church programs during their missions, or pioneering in new countries in the 1960s and 70s.

In the early Latin American missions there was little church organization overall; immature mission programs, insufficient church programs, little literature translated into Spanish, new members, and nascent leadership. Early leadership in the missions was disproportionately Anglo American, often from Utah. Sandra, a convert during the early years in Colombia said it took about four years in her mission to develop Colombian leadership in the stakes.¹ Today, most mission presidents come from the U. S. but every effort is made to put local leaders in stake, ward, and branch positions. Where the specialized mission division of labor today calls for pairs of missionaries to proselytize, fifty years ago, the field experience was determined by the needs of the local mission and fledgling branches. Women served in health missions and mission offices in addition to teaching (proselytizing) alongside the men. Elders also served in mission offices and as branches presidents, developing new local leaders. Some performed translation services. And others began church programs where none existed, translating entire church programs. Whatever their service, most of it was “learned on the job” including language, in the early days before the Language Training Mission and its successor the Missionary Training Center existed.

“President David O. McKay called for a doubling of the missionary force, which we were a part of” and fluent in Spanish, Victoria and Dean were expedited to the South American mission. Serving before the establishment of the LTM and the MTC, they

¹ Interview transcript, RMO dated June 23, 2008.
were teenaged missionaries in Idaho where they learned Spanish among the Mexicans in their home stake. Once called to Argentina and Uruguay, respectively, Victoria and Dean worked in the offices of the South American mission president, which was in charge of all of South America, or “the forerunner of the area president.” Victoria who served in Buenos Aires (1961-63) explained, “Our work was with urban people. The church typically grows from "centers of strength." Rather than roam all around the countryside and have some isolated members who cannot easily get together and nourish and strengthen each other, let's start where there are more people and gradually reach out to those [outer] areas.”

The first stake organized in Buenos Aires was in 1966 (Church Almanac 2012:420).

**Early Leaders**

Four participant men served as branch presidents or training leaders in the early missions of Uruguay, Bolivia, Argentina, and Paraguay in the absence of sufficient local priesthood holders to exercise leadership. As branch presidents they not only served as administrators, they also trained local leadership in the programs of the church. Nathan’s experience in Uruguay (1961-1964) was indicative of the maturation of a mission area and his role in that process. Among the first generation of missionaries who started arriving in the 1950s, Uruguay’s first stake was established in 1967. “The church was growing rapidly probably doubled in size while I was there, between 3,000 and 4,000 per year.” During the first half, he did missionary work as expected. But the last thirteen months, “the mission president pulled me into his office to work strictly with

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2 Stake missions, no longer utilized, were in effect from about 1900 to “bring the gospel to nonmembers in their boundaries” (Alexander 1986:108). All worldwide stakes’ demands for missionaries are currently met by the Missionary Program from Salt Lake City.

3 Interview transcript, RMC & RSC, dated June 20, 2007.
members to try and develop member leadership. I worked with branch presidents and
district presidents, training them with an eye on the day that the districts and branches
would become mature enough to be converted into wards and stakes.” Until there is
sufficient leadership developed, the early units are run by the mission president, in this
case, with the help of a missionary training the leaders. Once mature, the stake and its
president are independent of the mission president.

So, for the last thirteen months of my mission that was all that I did. And of
course, I had no training for that either. I was just trying to figure out what
needed to be done and here was a twenty to twenty-one year old kid telling these
mature men how to do their jobs – but they were wonderful and it was just a
great experience for me.4

Clay, in the pioneer church in Bolivia (1971-73) served six years prior to opening
of the first stake in 1979.

The Bolivian mission was only three years old, so I got to serve everywhere. I
did translating for the health missionaries [the second type of female missionary
serving at that time]; I served in the office of the mission secretary; I did a lot of
work with the government making travel plans [for missionaries]. I was called as
a branch president a couple of times, in Cochabamba. I was just a kid, and here
I am the branch president over families and grown-ups.”5

Where leadership was insufficient, church programs were underdeveloped.

From Primary through Relief Society, in all levels of the priesthood, and in local
administration, Dean recalled in Uruguay (1960-63) very little availability of church
programs or literature in Spanish.

I was also called to serve as branch president for a new branch – so I did that in
my evenings – meet with new members of that early branch. In the days when
we served there was very little [church literature] in Spanish available for the
leaders – I don't think I had any manual. I won't say we "made it up" but as a
branch president, to a certain extent we had to organize based on needs. [For]

4 Interview transcript, RMR, dated February 27, 2008.

5 Interview transcript, RMH, dated June 11, 2007.
the members, all of whom were new, we organized a leadership training class, just in terms of how to give a talk, hold a meeting. One of the main tasks was trying to put a Spanish sound track on some of the movies in English. We had very primitive equipment. So we’d get local members, make a translation into Spanish, and try to time it so that on a tape it would play at the same speed as the projector and then to our dismay found that due to the electrical situation these would not play together. It was really pioneering.\(^6\)

Patty’s mission president in Colombia (1974-76) had the women missionaries conduct “shadow leadership” to strengthen leadership in wards and branches. She recalled going into a small branch and setting up the various roles of leadership for women, saying, “‘This is what a Relief Society president does; this is what a Primary President does; this is what a Young Woman Leader . . . this is how you do it.’ We’d go in help with those responsibilities so that they would learn what it was they were to be doing. And then, we backed out of that and let them do it on their own.” She went on that the Colombian church was relatively new without functional wards or branches with little leadership. “Sometimes there was not a Relief Society or they really didn’t know what they were doing. But then, we had not yet been in Relief Society either! We had been in Primary and Young Women’s programs, but not [yet] Relief Societies.”\(^7\) Colombia’s first stake opened in 1977 a year after she finished her mission.

Developing leadership is a perennial challenge for the church because it is based upon successful membership recruitment, acculturation, and retention, assuming the mission has also developed sufficient church programs to perfect the membership. In the absence of leadership, these young missionaries had to step into branch president positions and leadership roles. These returned missionaries recalled their stories with a

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\(^6\) Interview transcript, RMC & RSC, dated June 20, 2007.

\(^7\) Interview transcript, RSH, dated June 11, 2007.
bit of incredulous wonder, if not a small amount of irony, at how it all worked out because they were charged with training positions they had never held. Having grown up in American where leadership was already in place, they felt almost as unprepared to lead a Latin American branch or Relief Society as those they were attempting to train. Surprisingly, none of the recollections included any local member resentment, only gratitude.

Victoria worked to set up the Church Educational System’s Primary School for youngsters, translating all materials into Spanish. “So we knocked on doors and invited all the children this Saturday. We’ll teach them how to pray and told the parents everything they would be learning. It was very successful; a lot of baptisms came out of it. The parents absolutely loved it and as Catholics they had never had teaching for their children.” By the end of her mission, “we ended up translating all the materials for Primary into Spanish for eleven missions – there were eleven Spanish speaking missions in the whole church.”\(^8\) Argentina was opened for missionary work in 1925. However, the main recruitment targets were European immigrants. By the time of Victoria’s service in 1961 there were only eleven Spanish language missions in the entire world. From her pioneer upbringing in Idaho, to her translation of Primary church materials in Argentina, she and her generation of missionaries has been witness to a wholesale demographic shift in the church, where today Spanish-speakers are the church majority.

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\(^8\) Interview transcript, RMC & RSC, dated June 20, 2007.
Reference Group Missionaries

As missionaries they knew they were to live exemplary lives as did Jesus and his disciples. As leaders, this awareness was heightened. The curiosities, the attractions, and the references about Americans as CIA or FBI operatives were a familiar missionary trope. Missionaries often functioned as a reference group that others attempted to emulate. Vincent, a Brazilian serving in Brazil (1979-81) was mistaken for an American: “Some of them know what you’re doing because they’ve talked to the missionaries before and they want to talk again. Some want to practice the little English that they know. When I was serving the mission, they would think anyone in a white shirt and tie was an American. I told them that I wasn’t an American.”

Patty’s service in Colombia began about ten years after the country was opened for missionary work. She laughingly described,

One of the things that often got us in doors was that I was a tall, blonde “gringa.” Gringa rubia! That’s what I got called! And so often people would talk to us just out of curiosity, who these gringas were, and what we were doing. So that often got us in doors, and then some people were receptive and other weren’t. But that was one thing that got us in doors – the curiosity.

Matthew returned from his Mexico mission (1976-78), said for the locals to see a “gringo speaking their language” got them into homes. Then, “we knew if there was any sensitivity to the spirit, they would be open for more [teaching.]” Sofia, serving in her home country Argentina (1971-72), rented a room in family home of non-members.

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10 Interview transcript, RSH, dated June 11, 2007
“Even though we didn’t intend to preach, they liked us. And they emulated us.” The family joined after Sofia’s mission was completed.\textsuperscript{12}

While this group of returned missionaries served as examples, returning with honor, they recalled times in the mission field when missionaries failed to live their covenants. Mission dismissals are an uncomfortable topic, and many of these missionaries more or less dismissed the question. However, Janelle recalled her mission president in Southern Argentina “white-washing” the entire mission – “where they take out all the missionaries and put in brand new ones. When white washing – maybe changing from elders to sisters, or at the request of a branch president, or maybe there was a problem and we never know for sure. I think this area was really struggling with no baptisms in a couple of years.”\textsuperscript{13} This case was the most dramatic description, but a few RMs discussed having very strict mission presidents who sent missionaries home for a variety of disciplinary reasons, as well as health issues. Conversely, Clay did not entertain the conversation of missionary discipline, saying given poor communications in Bolivia, he wasn’t “in on all the gossip.”\textsuperscript{14} The consensus is that missionaries who were sent home should have been called.

\textbf{Recruitment and Reactivation}

While some people were attracted to the church because of the valiant missionaries, there were still mission recruitment strategies, the most successful of which were those that included the entire family. If families are converted intact, the likelihood of retention climbs (Jarvis 2000), and Mormons know about the importance of

\textsuperscript{12} Interview transcript, RSM, dated June 25, 2008.

\textsuperscript{13} Interview transcript, RSP, dated June 17, 2007.

\textsuperscript{14} Interview transcript, RMH, dated June 11, 2007.
congruent faithful families. Hoping to recruit families, new members ideally start lineages of belief in the next generation. Furthermore, Mormon elders very readily attracted young single women who indicated interest in the faith. One former mission president instructed, “this is the challenge for missionaries, past, present, and future, to teach family groups rather than lots of young girls attracted to handsome missionaries. This is a very real issue; just like the movie [The Other Side of Heaven]. It was not as hard to bring single people in as to bring in families.”\textsuperscript{15} Matthew’s narrative out of Mexico also mentioned converting families as preferable to the hazards of contacting single young women, who he saw as opportunist. “We baptized several whole families – sometimes we had to take them down to the courthouse to legalize their marriages”. . . . “You couldn’t look at a girl twice or they would think you were interested. Especially if they were interested in going to the U. S. to escape the poverty.”\textsuperscript{16}

Although most converts come from the lower to middle economic strata depending on the area, Patty’s mission president’s recruitment strategy was to specifically target people in the more affluent areas of Bogota, based on an assumption that more affluent people are more successful and are therefore, potential leaders.

It was about ten years old when I got down there; I think in 1964, Colombia was opened to proselyting. So his objective was to strengthen wards and stakes or to build wards and stakes. And so one of the things he encouraged a lot was to approach people who we thought might have leadership abilities. So we’d knock on doors in more affluent areas, not because they were more receptive, but because he encouraged us to for leadership reasons.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Interview transcript, RMC & RSC, dated June 20, 2007.

\textsuperscript{16} Interview transcript, RMM, dated June 13, 2007.

\textsuperscript{17} Interview transcript, RSH, dated June 11, 2007.
In these early missions, where so much time was spent in training, the missionary program relied on various recruitment methods. “We’d teach English classes or whatever we needed to try to attract people that we could teach.” Having baptismal success through Primary children with the sanction of their parents was compared to the absence of parents in the episode of “baseball baptisms” which two RMs jokingly mentioned.\textsuperscript{18} Tracting was necessary, because referrals were so few from so few members. But Matthew recalled random tracting was not efficient. “Rather than tracting for two weeks in futility, we got on our knees and the Lord told us where to go. It turned out to be someone who was studying our church, the head of the town market.” He converted with his wife in Guadalajara.\textsuperscript{19} For Hector serving in Paraguay (1979-81) tracting, inspired by personal revelations, missionaries were guided on which doors to approach and were very successful.\textsuperscript{20}

And, finally, all of the missionaries in this study, active and returned, discussed having been involved in reactivating existing members. Jacob recalled “getting active members involved and getting inactive members back” during his mission in Manaus, Brazil (1995-97):

The trend was that people would just get baptized, and they’d become inactive because they didn’t have the support [of members] or the understanding [of the demands expected of them]. And that was a disturbing thing on many levels. So the new mission president that came in, after I had been in Brazil two months, started focusing on reactivating members who hadn’t gone to church, helping them to grow and understand the gospel. I think it was successful – now we didn’t have as many baptisms, but the actual numbers of member attending increased more than baptisms. So, that was really successful.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Interview transcript, RSH, dated June 11, 2007.

\textsuperscript{19} Interview transcript, RMM, dated June 13, 2007.

\textsuperscript{20} Interview transcript, RMM, dated June 23, 2008.

\textsuperscript{21} Interview transcript, RMD, dated June 10, 2007.
This trend of membership inactivity is not unique to his Brazilian mission; it is one of the most vexing of all missionary challenges and will be returned to later in the chapter. For Mormons the fruits of conversion and retention are both spiritual and temporal and they have implications for individuals and the church. The goal of proselytizing is to work from the inside out, which is to say, if a person changes spiritually, then material improvements will naturally follow and their progress in the church will expand leadership, strengthening stakes in Zion. As they perfect themselves, the ripple effect has consequences for their families. The hope is ultimately to convert entire families, and they will improve their own lives and help continually revitalize the life of the community, perfecting the Latter-day Saints in stakes in Zion. The retention of members is necessary for leadership, which is required for stake growth and strength. While retentions are a challenge, these returned missionaries marvel at the current numbers of stakes in the Americas (see Appendix F). We turn now to missionary work among Lamanites and Catholics, the source of church growth in the Americas.

Inviting Lamanites and Catholics to Come unto Christ

Lamanites

The two groups of peoples in this story of great interest to the Mormons are the Lamanites and the Roman Catholics. The prophecy of Lamanite conversion is the fulfillment of Joseph Smith’s millenarian vision, along with conversion or adoption of the “Gentiles” (including Catholics) into the “new covenant” (Underwood 1993:30). For Mormons, it is an obligation to return the descendants of the Lamanites to their ancient religion, saving them and the world’s Catholics from the apostasies of their forefathers.
The study of missionary narratives demonstrates the problems in religious switching, and the difficulties of cultural encounter, and retention. Taken together, these problems have implications for developing sufficient leadership, a problem that faces the international church, which these missionaries encountered.

Of seven returned missionaries who discussed the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the conversion of the descendants of Lamanites, three had served among them in Guatemala, Bolivia, and Mexico. Horacio grew up in the FFLM, born to Guatemalan parents in California. He served (2003-2004/2006) in the in the North Mission of Guatemala City and in the mountainous region of Polochic where he learned K’ekchi’. Horacio witnessed dramatic numbers of conversions under his mission president who, early in Horacio’s mission, had Guatemala and El Salvador in one large area mission. Within the two years, Guatemala and El Salvador were separated; Guatemala had an approximate forty stakes and two temples. Horacio’s mission was the highest number of baptisms of the four missions in Guatemala, which he attributed to the Lamanites and the fulfillment of prophecy – both Mormon and indigenous: “We taught the Book of Mormon people, the Lamanites, so we’re just there fulfilling the promises.”

Some of them, mainly, when we talk about Christ’s visit to the Americas, they’d be like, ‘that’s like the story of Quetzalcoatl and he came here, and it’s almost like the same one.’ We’re like, ‘You’re descendants, the ruins are here in the

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country and these promises are there for you.' So, we talked about them becoming members and they are the Lamanites, the Book of Mormon people.\textsuperscript{24}

Discussing Central America more broadly, he said, "Nicaragua always baptizes like 2,000-3,000 a year, so all of Central America is like a Book of Mormon prophecy being fulfilled." Showing a picture of the temple visit by the K’eckhi’ branch, he said they attended the temple once a year, because the drive took eight or more hours and it cost a lot of money. Pointing to the temple, he went on,

This was my last week and they were all together there; I have to get a picture of this, because it is like the fulfillment from Doctrines & Covenants – that the Lamanites will ‘blossom like a rose,’ and these are like pure Lamanites. That’s why the gospel is growing so much there because of the promises before to Lehi and his descendants. ‘Yea, people just understand when you pull out the Book of Mormon.’ While in Guatemala City, Horacio reconnected with remaining family although there was no mention of his lineage descended from the Lamanites.\textsuperscript{25}

Clay spoke of his mission in Bolivia (1971-1973): “The country of Bolivia is the most Lamanite – or Indian – country in Latin America by far. About fifty percent of the population are pure Lamanite, pure Indian people. And ninety-five percent were of Indian blood, with very few Europeans there.” When asked if this Book of Mormon lineage was of any appeal, Clay said it was even though they didn’t tract by saying, “Hey, we’re looking for Lamanites.”\textsuperscript{26} His wife Patty who served in Colombia just shortly thereafter added,

One of the discussions that they had during that time was about the Americas and we used that a lot as an approach, as an opening discussion. Because they knew the legends about the great white god that had been in America and in different countries he was known by a different name. But, their ancestors, especially those who are Indians, they knew those legends, and people who

\textsuperscript{24} Interview transcript RME, June 17, 2007.

\textsuperscript{25} Interview transcript, RME, dated June 17, 2007.

\textsuperscript{26} Interview transcript, RMH, dated June 11, 2007.
knew them from history and from their generations, so that was an appeal to people I think – that it was part of their heritage.27

Returning to his work in Bolivia, Clay continued, “Actually, the Book of Mormon and the identification of them being people of the book was a profound thing. And that was definitely an appeal, to be in the land of the Book of Mormon, and to be descendants of these people right here. They took a lot of interest and pride really in being part of that group.”28

A recent blog is posted from Bolivia by anthropologist David Knowlton, who is an RM from Bolivia around the same time as Clay and Patty. While some of the missionaries in this study including Clay and Patty discussed Book of Mormon heritage as an appeal for conversion among indigenous Americans, Knowlton’s work suggests Lamanite ancestry serves as an ethnic identity for Bolivian Mormons:

I am in Bolivia at the moment immersed in this reality. The idea that Bolivians are BoFM [Book of Mormon] peoples has a strong impact among members of the Church here, who take the notion literally. A local leader (archeologist) has written a popular book among Mormons building a relationship between the BoFM narrative and Bolivia’s archeology. His name is Hans Ralf Caspary. Just [the] day before yesterday I was talking with a local leader about Cusco and he said that the water basins near Cusco were baptismal fonts, i.e. people locate their ideology in local archeological features. . . . For me, much of the point of the BoFM “indigenous” reality is that it gives people a claim on indigenous history and reality, while not having to carry any of the specific history or details of organic indian [sic] identities and ideologies (Knowlton 2010).

In the proselyting narratives among and conversions of people of Lamanite ancestry there is excitement and joy at the fulfillment of Book of Mormon prophecy. Without expressing much concern for indigenous lineages of belief or the cultural implications of missionary work, they go about their proselytizing in a relatively matter-


of-fact method. For the chosen people of God who alone have this mission, Israel and adopted Gentiles must be gathered into stakes in Zion all over the world. While religious switching may cause cleavages in the families, for Mormons and their successful converts, the rewards are well worth any trials, tests, or sacrifices.

**Roman Catholic Families**

In addition to the gathering of Lamanites, Gentiles in need of conversion and salvation include the millions of Roman Catholics throughout the Americas. If of indigenous blood, all the better for them, as the discussion above indicates; it is entirely possible or likely to be Lamanite and Catholic. Where Lamanites are a celebrated lineage in Mormonism, Roman Catholics are an apostate lineage. In Mormon teachings it was the heresy of the fourth century Roman Catholics that plunged all of Christianity into the Great Apostasy for over 1,400 years. If Catholics are apostates, for Catholics Mormons would be heretics. But because both groups were subject to anti-religious violence in nineteenth century America, they took little action against one another and in the contemporary times some Mormons and Catholics find common cause in political conservatism. Beyond orthodoxies, there are also affinities between Catholicism and Mormonism that resonate among peoples of Latin America, such as family lineages and community solidarities.

Turning to the recruitment of Catholics in the Americas, there are mixed results as would be expected. While the family-centric doctrines of Mormonism are an appeal, Catholics may be just as likely to reject Mormonism out of family loyalty, which is to say they are often reticent to leave their family lineages of Catholic belief and culture however nominal in favor of new Mormon lineages of belief. In Catholicism, they too, have a sacred canopy as the original Christianity 2000 years old, with a transcendent
God in heaven, the intercessor Virgin Mary and the Communion of saints including their ancestors and patrons watching over them, the apostolic linkage through the pope and the Magisterium that protects the boundaries of the faithful. Catholics absolutely believe they are the first and only church of Jesus Christ’s apostles. However, unlike the Mormons, most post-Vatican II Catholics no longer necessarily believe “extra ecclesiam nulla salus” – outside the church there is no salvation. If the Catholic Church is no longer the only source of salvation, there is an opening for other religions in countries where religious pluralism exists. This post-Vatican II era of the 1960s was when the diversification of the Latin American Roman Catholic social milieu largely began.

**Catholic Disillusionment**

Throughout the Americas, overwhelmingly, converts joined from the nominally Catholic who attended mass at Christmas and Easter, and people who were disillusioned with Catholicism where there have historically been too few priests and more recently, clerical scandals. Sofia’s story, a convert from Argentina who served in her home country, captured a common narrative:

> My [Catholic] mother first kicked out the missionaries. But a few years later, she was very disillusioned with Catholics and the church, there were local scandals. She distrusted the church and was looking for something. When the sister missionaries came, she didn’t have any problem understanding. You have to go through prayer to find out if the conversion is for you. They cannot convince you – you must get a personal testimony. She had not been to mass except for Christmas and Easter.  

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29 While Catholic vocations have dropped all over the world, it is not uniform; there is a rise in married deacons. The National Catholic Reporter shows U.S. priests are down from 1965 at almost 64,000 to 40,000 in 2010; and almost 180,000 nuns to 57,000 at the same time the Catholic population has grown by 20 million to 65.5 million. Excluding Mexico, the ratio of priest to parishioner is about 1:1600. Latin America and the Caribbean have struggled with developing native priest and nuns for all of its history, due in part to systemic racism, the costs of education, and due in part to no system of anticipatory socialization. In Central and South America, the ratio of priest to parishioner is almost 1:7000. Contrast this with the Mormon ward bishop to member ratio, approximately 1:300-400 (Roberts 2010).

30 Interview transcript, RSM, dated June 25, 2008.
Sofia’s mother’s story of the conversion process comports to the stages involved and the role of the missionaries in the process (Lasater 2003). Missionaries actually see themselves as teachers who facilitate conversion. But the necessary triggering mechanism – the testimony – comes only by the Holy Ghost, which is sought by the investigator in prayer and reading scripture, specifically Moroni 10:3-5. Finding out if the conversion is for you” means getting the confirming testimony of personal revelation. Through this method, revelation is made personal and rational for Mormons.

Another convert with her immediate family in Colombia, Sandra came from a very strong Catholic family, a family in which extended members were included in the conversation. Her father became disillusioned by the Catholic “underbelly that is coming out now. In Colombia, they believed that every family has a religious leader. In my dad’s Catholic family, he was the one who had to do it. Very important for the family religion. It was very tough for him to see one thing taught, and what they did.” There is a fundamental inability to question Catholic authority. Her grandmother said,

You shouldn’t be reading the Bible, it will make you crazy. The mass was still taught in Latin. So, nobody thinks they aren’t practicing Catholicism since it is a religion of absolution rather than practicing. You just don’t change your religion in a Catholic country, going to school obeying the nuns, you really never offend authority.”

Even though extended family could see the fruits of Mormon conversion for Sandra and her family, they were still risk averse. “

A lot of the people I taught, including my own aunt, they are very happy that we are Mormons and a church that teaches principles in a great family arrangement. But they are afraid, they think that they were born catolicos, Roman and apostolic, and they cannot change, or they can’t even find a job. They don’t want to dare, to take that risk. People are concerned socially – and also, it was the family severance.
Sandra’s father didn’t have to worry for his employment and as the head of his household, they converted and their daughter finished Catholic school, served a mission in her home country (1981-82), went to BYU and met her future husband, an RM from Portugal.  

For most, the attachments were to the tradition of the family, more so than to the church proper. Catholics share many of the same moral values on human sexuality, but Catholicism lacks the institutional accountability of Mormonism’s temple recommend. Confession is not a sufficient mechanism, especially where the syndrome of machismo exists, few priests are available to administer confessions, and confessional recidivism is high generally. Therefore, the husband as head of the household is a deal-breaker or maker for a family’s religious change. Sofia continued about Argentinean men, 

It depends on how attached they were to their Catholic tradition, not so much the church, but the family tradition. It was easier to find women and children at home, and then the husbands on the second visit, if possible. When members converted they were very strong, it was powerful; even Mormon men are very strong [following their conversions].

And Dean agreed, “The husband is the key; otherwise you’re dividing a family more than uniting.”

Over the past fifty years, establishing new Mormon lineages of belief out of nominal Catholics has been proven a fruitful mission in the Americas. As one mission president returned from Uruguay mentioned, inactive Catholics found conversion “an easy shift” for several reasons to which his wife replied, “Catholics make great

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31 Interview transcript, RSO, June 23, 2008.
33 Interview transcript, RMC & RSC, dated June 20, 2007.
Among those reasons that make conversion from Catholicism to Mormonism (Shuster 2009) what one missionary called a “lateral move” is most importantly a belief in Jesus Christ as the savior and only begotten son of God the Father in heaven. Additionally, Catholics are amenable to religious experiences such as miracles, signs, visions, dreams, healings, and spiritual promptings by what they may call the Holy Spirit. These experiences make it easy to understand the Mormon’s personal revelations by the Holy Ghost. While Charismatic Catholics may experience the pneumacentric gifts of the Holy Spirit (Chestnut 2003), those expressions will not be welcome in Mormonism where revelatory manifestations are interior, constrained, and little spoken. Where both religions appear to be hierarchies of elderly white men, their highest offices are very different. However, it may be that the shift from the Catholic pope to the Mormon prophet is unproblematic. The larger problem with be the shift from Catholic patron to Mormon prophet.

**Other Catholic Attachments**

The attachments to the Virgin Mary and patron saints are often a difficult matter. Adam, returned from Peru, agreed with Gary and Gordon Shepherd some forty years earlier; authentic conversions showed signs of outward resolve:

When they give up the Virgin Mary and the saints it isn’t hard for them to give up. That is usually one of the first things they will ask us – [and we say,] ‘you should worship only Christ.’ They’ll ask about the statue – they pray to the statue – so we’ll tell them it is better if you don’t have those temptations to worship other than Christ. If they are serious, they recognize that Christ is the one you pray to – not something like an idol. If they are actually serious, they give up their old beliefs and their statues.  

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34 Interview transcript, RMR, dated February 27, 2008.

35 Interview transcript, RMS, dated April 13, 2008.

Other RMs indicated that giving up Catholic traditions were not so easy and made them vulnerable to slippage. Sandra spoke of everyday life, even patterns of Catholic speech, “There were living things that you carry on even in your conversations – like, ‘Ave Maria’ or ‘blessed art thou.’” Her husband, a bishop and RM from Portugal, interjected, “The Catholics have a lot of good luck charms, they have a lot of things, like the cross, that they can’t get away from those things. And little statues.” His wife added,

And they circulate these things to get more miracles. Rather than just believing in the Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, it is tough. Oh, they did bring these things into their Mormon lives, not in the church, but in their life. But it is fascinating to see the changes, and the learning. But if left on their own, they go back to their old ways.37

Patty and Clay in Colombia and Bolivia, respectively, indicated that giving up cultural traditions was always a challenge for Catholics and missionaries, alike, who had to be the messengers.

They [Catholic artifacts] were in everybody’s’ homes. That was constant, the pictures, the crucifix, the crucifixes they wore, that was a challenge because traditionally that’s what they’ve done, that’s what they’ve been raised with. So there was always a discussion about why as a member of the LDS Church we didn’t use those. And that sometimes that was a difficult thing, sometimes people readily understood and would give them up, but I think that was a hard thing for people because that was very much a part of peoples’ lives. If they had the intention of being baptized, it had to be a discussion.38

There emerges a fundamental misunderstanding among the Mormon missionaries (and no doubt, among other Christians and missionaries, as well) that Catholics worship their icons of patron saints and the Virgin Mary. In the historical

37 Interview transcript, RSO, June 23, 2008.
antagonisms between Protestants and Catholics there has been a purposefully perpetuated misunderstanding of so-called Catholic idolatry. Adopted by the earliest Christians who were illiterate and did not have access to the printed Bible as did later Protestants, iconography has a long tradition in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions. What Catholics and Orthodox believe about the communion of saints that Protestants generally do not, is that the heavens are filled with ancestors, martyrs, and saintly people (some beatified) who have lived before and are recognized as intercessors, most especially the Virgin and the patron saints. Catholics adopt a patron saint who has special meaning to them for divine help and assistance. The “little statue” is a visual reminder that the special patron or the Virgin is accessible, listening, comforting, and will intercede. In fact, the appearance of the Virgin Mary to the indigenous peasant Juan Diego has given millions of parishioners throughout Mexico and the Americas a spiritual affinity for her, so much so that Pope John Paul II named her the Patroness of the Americas. The efficacy of Roman Catholic intercessors is well documented (León 2004; Orsi 2002, 1996; Rey 1999; Tweed 1997).

Catholics also ask for intercession from their dead ancestors. It is a common comfort for Catholics in times of distress to say, “Offer it up to the poor souls in Purgatory.” Those souls, as part of their penitential rites of post-mortem purification, are to take on our troubles and help us with them. Mexicans, for example, celebrate *Dia de los Muertos* in honor of their dead and ask them to intercede on behalf of the living. Mormons invite into temple baptisms their ancestors, who died before the founding of the church, and who have presumably “heard the gospel in the spirit world” and are “willing to accept” LDS beliefs (McDannell and Lang 2001:140). In both the Catholic
and Mormon cases, the living attempt to spiritually align with their dead in ways that perpetuate the sacred canopy and their lineages of belief between heaven and earth. If there is a possible comparison here, it needs further explication and research, but it is to say that the dead are important for the living, and have a specific function in the afterworld, within both religious belief systems. And in any case, when Mormons ask Catholics – especially those involved in the practice of popular Catholicism in the Americas – to leave their family and spiritual lineages, they are asking a great deal, for among the Latin American poor, family may well be all they have. For Mormons, however, the possibility of the highest degree of salvation for an eternal family is worth the invitation into a community of saints now even if families fracture as a result, which Jesus himself predicted.

Catholics, with their beliefs and practices, are what Mormons often call “confused.” The problem of Catholic confusion is connected to belief in the Trinity, which is at variance with the Mormon godhead. Janelle, returned from Argentina (1997-98), discussed the at length the ambiguities in the process of conversion.

They are very devout in their rituals . . . many were very, very attached to Mary; that was a tough one to give up the idea of praying to Mary. And the statues of the saints that they worshiped; it was hard to give up. One thing that was difficult for Catholics to grasp was the idea of an individual godhead – God and Christ and Holy Ghost. The Trinity is so ingrained; it was just a hard thing to teach. We teach them that we only pray to the Heavenly Father, so we teach them how to pray in the name of the Savior, but part of the conversion is that we don’t worship others. That’s like the number one commandment: worship the Lord God only. So, it is really interesting because the Catholics are very much into the commandments, but they don’t connect those two very well. So, no we’re not going to clean their houses out of statues. But we do teach them correctly how to pray – to the Heavenly Father and not to Mary. Especially for the women – there’s nothing wrong with respecting and honoring Mary, who is one of the greatest women who ever lived and had this amazing responsibility that she was
given. They need to understand that not praying to Mary does not mean not respecting and honoring her for what she’s done.\footnote{Interview transcript, RSP, dated}

When I asked her if then a Catholic can retain their Mary statue she replied,

> They may always have her [the Mary statue], and I don’t know. But conversion doesn’t happen overnight. You can feel the spirit and have a conviction of truth, but conversion is a process. I think both missionaries and members of the church need to understand that . . . over a period of time . . . that you settle into a new culture, really.\footnote{Interview transcript, RSP, June 16, 2008.}

The place of Mary within Mormonism appears to be an ambiguous one. While the normative role of wife and motherhood is the highest calling to which LDS women are expected to aspire, the person of Mary, the mother of Jesus appears largely missing from Mormon theology and conversation. This absence is curious given the valorization of the woman’s role in family life. A further ambiguity is the role in Mormonism of the Heavenly Mother who, without any name or identity, serves as an eternal procreative spouse with God, the Heavenly Father. Beyond that sexual role, the Heavenly Mother is little attended to in Mormon patriarchal culture, a topic for future exploration.

**Culture, Retention, and Leadership Development**

For some missionaries, the cultural differences were very striking and memorable, making missionaries increasingly cautious, especially where syncretisms were evident. Eugene’s experience in Brazil (1988-89) was a culture shock:

> Recife, poor in most areas, had a lot of African influence. The slave trade ended and this is where most landed. Ninety-eight percent African ancestry. With that there was a lot of mixture of Christianity and some Afro-Brazilian religious expression. You’d go into a home and there were Roman Catholic saints on the walls, and they’d have their gods, their candles, a little shrine. We’d be walking down the street and see a sacrificed chicken, in a crossing or at a RR tracks.
don’t know much about that but I saw quite a bit of that – interesting for a boy from Eastern Oregon in a town of 400 people.41

Showing a picture of cock fighting from service while in Mexico (2004-06), Donny recalled encountering witchcraft and worshiping of the Grim Reaper. “One inactive Mormon member was a water fortune teller” which he acknowledges may have been for financial reasons. While he realized these are not features of Catholicism, still people with these practices would generally self-identify as Catholics. “But with more experience, the missionary becomes increasingly careful about who they baptize – they don’t want to baptize people who are unable to sustain their commitment.”42 Finding better investigators who are likely to be retained is now a common member initiative.

The problem of retention is worldwide, but the rates of inactivity seem to be worse in the peripheral areas of the church, including Latin America, as discussed earlier in this study. In several interviews with RMs about retention efforts, they acknowledged that to become a Mormon is a total conversion of life. Here is a fairly typical discussion with Matthew who served in Guadalajara, worth quoting in length because it captures a common missionary view:

In Mexico, it is definitely a different culture. The zone leaders had us raise our hands – you are now in Mexico. You are going to see things that won’t make sense, leave it be. You won’t understand, so just love these people with all that you have. You’ll gain a great appreciation for what they do have, even though it seems like they have so little or that they do things that traditionally are absurd or insane or whatever. But because of that great love, if you had any prejudices, at nineteen those go away, and the spirit makes you ready to teach, and teach them what they need to know.43

41 Interview transcript, RMEH, April 15, 2008.
42 Interview transcript, RMS, April 13, 2008.
On the one hand, Matthew discusses how irrational features of Mexican religio-
culture appear to be. On the other hand, learning to love people despite their
absurdities will erase any prejudices. Meanwhile, LDS leaders minimize the religio-
cultural encounter by saying that all religions have some pieces of truth, and the
Mormons are only there to provide the ‘fulness’ of the truth that they alone possess.
This is what Matthew meant when he said, “You’ll gain a great appreciation for what
they do have, even though it seems like they have so little.” However, the religio-cultural
encounter is a very significant and life changing event. It means giving up what is
perceived by missionaries as traditionally “absurd or insane or whatever.” Love them
anyway, and as Mormons often say about the incompatibilities, ‘teach it away.’ Here is
what a convert can expect based on Matthew’s experience in Mexico:

The LDS Church is such a total way of life-encompassing gospel – not just
certain things – this is the complete church put back on the earth. If you love
your fellow man, [are you] being a strong father in the home, being a priesthood
leader, or a mother to nurture the family. And the law of tithing with the blessings
that flow back – money seems to grow on trees sometimes. The Word of
Wisdom gets rid of health-hurting things and expenses. The law of chastity is
being faithful, honorable so that your marriages succeed and the children see
that example. They want to study hard, be a good model – from the inside out
rather than the behavioral outside in.44

Matthew’s description of the total transformation of life, including sobriety, an
improved standard of living, and reformed families comports to Brusco’s “reformation of
machismo” (Brusco 1995). Assuming Matthew is correct, the fruits of inside-out
conversion in Mexico can be seen in Donny’s mission in Monterey thirty years later.
Inside-out conversion, in Mormon thought, is most likely to produce long term change
for the individual, her family, and the church community. Donny served in eight wards,

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where they baptized about an average 200 people per month, adding two stakes during his two year mission. He thinks in time the church will be Mexican – the “Church of Jesus Christ” in Mexico with Mexican music and Mexican parties. During those two years, he watched the leadership transform from fifty percent American – Mexican to his approximation of seventy percent Mexican to thirty percent American. As evidence, he explained that although his mission president was American, adjacent mission presidents were Mexican, and a General Authority is Mexican. The MTC in Mexico City is helping to generate increasing numbers of Mexican missionaries, but Americans are still needed because of the rapid growth.  

Dean and Victoria served as Mission President in the Mexico City North Mission (1996-99) during which the ratio of American to Mexican missionaries went from fifty percent each to about thirty percent American and seventy percent Mexican. The goal of the church “is to make [the church in] every country self-sufficient.”

Ultimately, across many conversations with members, and interviews with missionaries, returned missionaries and leaders, there is no one prescribed way to handle the messy cultural features of conversion. First, missionaries must use discernment in the invitation process; their mission and stake leaders provide guidance as does the Holy Ghost who they are to turn to for missionary help. Second, once investigators are ready for baptism, for some missionaries (and their leaders) there must be a definite demarcation between being a Mormon and being a Catholic, a dramatic turning away from the old to the new as the only assurance of an authentic

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46 Interview transcript, RMC & RSC, dated June 20, 2007.
conversion. For others it is a process that takes empathy, time, and teaching, as residual Catholicisms tend to fall away. This process is what Mormons say is ‘teaching it away.’ Victoria discussed new members in Relief Society meetings:

In Argentina, some of the Relief Society sisters were bringing candles and so they stopped that. We don’t do candles of any sort; we don’t any longer need our little statues. It’s not customary to wear a crucifix, if it still has meaning, but it wasn’t an issue for us. Our point is to let them deal with any remnants of Catholicism incompatible with Mormonism individually and that their new church activity and commitment would ultimately take care of itself. We never felt we were on an anti-Catholic campaign; we were here to offer something more.⁴⁸

Among most missionaries, there was care not to discourage new members undergoing an entire change of life, while at the same time they want to be sure that conversions are authentic; both strategies are in service of facilitating conversions that last.

**Word of Wisdom**

In addition to familial and cultural attachments that are obstacles to joining, there is the ever-present temptation of the prohibitions contained in the Word of Wisdom, which are mentioned by nearly every missionary in this study. Drinking seems to be sometimes conflated with Catholic culture; there is, of course, the sacramental wine. But problems with drinking are particularly acute during carnival and festival times around Latin America and the Caribbean. And if a member slips and the bishop finds out, it will be cause for discipline pending repentance, which may mean forfeiting a calling. From Alex’s service in Peru (2004-06), he saw the church festivals as an excuse for bingeing:

You see the big churches and festivals, but the Catholic Church isn’t really strong with the people. The Catholic Church is more like a once a year thing – more of a cultural thing. Different virgins, drinking, and socializing. The main reason they go to festivals is for partying and drinking. Once they become members of our

church, we’re not going to tell them they can’t do things. But of course, they definitely know – they stop doing those things. They do it voluntarily.\textsuperscript{49}

Drinking and festivals of course are not limited to Latin America. Reynaldo served among Mexican Latinos in Independence, Missouri (2003-05), where some of his investigators also struggled.

So, the Word of Wisdom was the obstacle if there was one. They were Catholic by tradition but not by practice, exactly. It had been part of their lives, the tradition of drinking, for example. One of the most amazing times was like three or four families, about fifteen people we brought to church. Some of them became members, and for those who didn’t it was the Word of Wisdom. We’d make a plan and we’d say, ‘Ok, you’re gonna dry out – just kidding with them – you’ll go with us for a week, read this scripture, and we’ll call and see how you’re doing and find out.’ You could see them progress like to the second week but then here comes \textit{Cinco de Mayo}, and they would just fall through.\textsuperscript{50}

Word of Wisdom temptations are not limited to drinking either. Sandra’s discussion of experiences in Colombia – Colombian coffee – were reminiscent of my own difficulties with the Word of Wisdom prohibition on coffee.

Either they couldn’t quit smoking, or wouldn’t quit, or drinking. But drinking, not so much a problem, usually smoking. Coffee and cigarettes were the biggest issues in Colombia. Coffee probably more than cigarettes – Colombian coffee! Everybody drank coffee, even little kids, everybody. So that was a hard thing for people. Some never joined the church because they couldn’t give it up but some were very diligent and gave it up.\textsuperscript{51}

For Clay who served as a branch president in Bolivia and stake president in the FFLM, investigators will readily feel the urgings of the Holy Ghost; the Holy Ghost always testifies to the truth. “It happened a lot, almost every day that you’d have this spiritual experience of having the Holy Ghost just testify to people and you could see it in their eyes. So, that was wonderful. Those are the powerful parts of the mission.”

\textsuperscript{49} Interview transcript, RMM, dated June 13, 2007.

\textsuperscript{50} Interview transcript, RMP, dated June 17, 2007.

\textsuperscript{51} Interview transcript, RSO, dated June 23, 2008.
But once converted acculturation and retention in the church all come down to the covenants and persevering through the power of the Holy Ghost. He described,

> The covenants they were expected to live, not using coffee or tea tobacco or alcohol, obeying the law of chastity, of paying their tithing. These were all pretty demanding things for people who never had had to do anything nearly that tough. So to get to that point, my experience was, that people would very quickly and often feel the spirit as you taught them these powerful lessons and you see the light in their eyes. And the stronger they felt it and the more often they felt it the more strength it gave them to make those commitments. And the more they got a testimony, they really did it because they wanted to do it and it was the right thing to do; as if God had told them to do it.\(^{52}\)

But Clay explained that there are many for whom the change was just too dramatic; it asked too much of them.\(^{53}\)

When considering religious change, potential members are often faced with difficult cultural choices. Often caught between the choice of family and church, or family and culture, there are two fundamental principles at work: free agency and obedience to authority – and the dialectic between the two. The dialectic confrontation “involved a process of self-definition and redefinition, especially for converts” (Taber 1993:6-7). The Word of Wisdom was often “central to that redefinition” as converts worked through the choices. The Word of Wisdom “is a reminder to the Saints that they are the “Chosen People” of God,” an important mark of collective identity (Shipps, May and May 1994:313). Therefore, to be a Colombian Mormon is to give up coffee and that is non-negotiable meaning that the Colombian must choose between Colombian culture and Mormonism, “a religio-culture movement” (Shipps, May, and May 1994:294) also known as the “culture of Zion” (Nibley 1978:27). Where the covenant demands of the

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\(^{52}\) Interview transcript, RMH, dated June 11, 2007.

\(^{53}\) Ibid.
church are admittedly high, mitigating against conversion and retention, the general consensus among these Mormons is that the standards of the church should not be lowered, including the difficult proscriptions in the Word of Wisdom. However, where strict churches with high demands are appealing for entry (Iannaconne 1997b), those same demands may later become the reasons for exit (Gooren 2010). Nevertheless, the missionary can only persevere and respect the personal agency of their investigators and new converts. As Janelle said, “conversion is a process” and people are ready when God prepares them to be. These missionaries all experienced touching conversion stories that helped to solidify their testimonies and are a cause for celebration, gratitude, and validation of missionary life.

**Celebrating Conversion Stories**

Every missionary had a poignant and triumphant conversion story facing great odds and sometimes persecution. Those most special involved someone who had entirely changed their lives, typically those Catholics most difficult to convert – the very religious, or the recalcitrant males, especially those who eventually bring along their families. Having joined the church, these families typically become educated and upwardly mobile. Patty was sitting on a bus in Colombia when she saw what she assumed to be a Catholic priest.

There was a guy who had on a big huge cross that filled up his chest. He had on priest’s clothing, the collar, and from the Catholic Church, which I was a little nervous about. But he came and sat down beside me, and we had a great conversation. He was studying to be a priest so this was something of interest to him. But he also had a girlfriend and so could not enter into the priesthood.\(^\text{54}\)

\(^{54}\) Interview transcript, RSH, dated June 11, 2007.
She and her companion ultimately taught him and his girlfriend, both of whom were baptized. “It was a great baptism, a great experience!” Among Mormons, to convert a devout Catholic is a celebrated feat, especially if that Catholic is studying to become a priest. The assumption is that if a person studying Catholic theology converts to Mormonism, the truth of Mormonism is validated as self-evident. Additionally, in this case, the priesthood in Catholicism is perceived by Mormons to be in error because it arose out of the Great Apostasy, requiring celibacy and ordination. Because this man left the celibate, ordained Catholic priesthood in favor of the married, laity Mormon priesthood, his conversion is a heroic story and proof of Mormon truth. Most conversion stories are however among nominal Catholics.

Nathan remembered Jorge, a boat yard worker who was a painter, who he and his companion found in the street, according to his companion, as a drunkard. As Nathan said, “maybe he wasn’t in a fully responsible state, and he said, sure come over and talk to us!” He and his new wife lived with her parents. Shortly after the lessons began Jorge and wife had a baby. Nathan and companion “weren’t overly optimistic given how we found him. But Jorge was intrigued by the restoration, read the scriptures, and had a seriousness about him as he was learning. Until he heard, ‘stay away from those Mormons—they’re polygamists!’” Nathan described the scene:

And he came over to our apartment and he was so mad. We never talked about it; it was not part of the church and hadn’t been for a long time. But he came in and was so angry because we hadn’t told him about this and he felt as if he had been betrayed somehow. And so that was a long talk and it was a very faith-promoting experience because we all realized that the Lord intervened and helped him and us to work through that and understand it as part of the history of the church; that it did not change the truth of the restoration.

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56 Interview transcript, RMR, dated February 27, 2008.
Having transferred and lost track of Jorge, years later, upon Nathan’s return to BYU, his former companion called and said, “Remember Jorge?” They reconnected and caught up. Since that time Jorge and his family had become members; he had gone to art school, won an international art competition, had lived in Mexico and taught at the *Universidad de las Americas*. They also lived in Ibiza and Valencia, where he helped pioneer the early Spanish church, and returned to Argentina when faced with children of marriageable age. “They had a [family] pow-wow. . . what do we want to be? Mexican, Spanish or Argentine?” All his children had graduated from BYU, and at least three married Americans, with one child returning to Argentina. Meanwhile, Jorge has moved back to his hometown, does private art and contracting, and oversees the art programs in the provincial schools. His life, as unique as it is, follows the fairly typical pattern of LDS conversion and retention, or in other words, Jorge made and kept his covenants yielding a life of upward mobility. While Mormons do not preach a gospel of prosperity, newfound success is an expected result of conversion. And as Mormons are an apparently relatively affluent reference group, it may be that potential converts hope that to become Mormon is to become prosperous.

**Upward Mobility**

Victoria attributes this success to the Mormon emphasis on education and access to the Perpetual Education Fund for missionaries, and the discipline of the Word of Wisdom. She recalled a “dirt-poor” Guatemalan family of fifteen, all of whom have become educated adults with degrees, and master’s, too. The money spent outside of the household, is now redirected under the Word of Wisdom. And even tithing, as counter-intuitive as it seems, they become better money managers, realizing that they have made a commitment to give ten
percent. And the PEF provides funds from church members to any student who doesn’t have the money for education post-high school.57

These stories of Mormon upward mobility resonate with the literature on conversions to various Christianities in the Americas, among them to Pentecostal and evangelical Protestantism, Charismatic Catholicism, and Jehovah’s Witnesses (Fortuny Loret de Mola 2000; Peterson 2001). In these cases, a “reformation of machismo” (Brusco 1995) results when men give up substances, legalize their marriages, align their domestic goals to those of their wives, divert money from outside interests back to the family, and become more successful bread-winners and fathers.

Among these participants, upward social mobility resulting from conversion is the approach for social change in Mormonism rather than political activism employed against structural inequalities. President Ezra Taft Benson is often quoted in Mormon circles, and among these missionaries,

The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of the people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. The world would mold men by changing their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature (Benson 1985).

For Mormons, Clay paraphrased President Benson and returned to the importance of covenants for people who want to change their material lives through a spiritual approach.

The point is not to take someone out of the slums but to take the slums out of people and then they take themselves out of the slums. And it is unbelievable the change you see in people when they have accepted those covenants and they live them, the way they change their lives. They may be the same poor person selling bread on the corner to make a living, but ten years down the road

57 Interview transcript, RMC & RSC, dated June 20, 2008.
there is just a huge difference. ‘Here’s the truth, learn the truth, live the truth, and the truth will set you free.’

He went on to confirm that Mormons take a different approach, it makes sense in their view, and he is unapologetic. “So when it comes to humanitarian and social issues we have a view of it, a different approach. It may seem self-serving to some people who say ‘you just want to convert more people.’ Of course, this is the truth, this is what makes people change and be better.”

**Latin American Inequality and Culture**

With regard to redressing social inequalities, most of these missionaries concur with a preference for individual personal responsibility and cultural change as opposed to political mobilization such as the teachings of Latin American liberation theology. Unlike many Catholics working among the poor who were radicalized into progressive left political action, these missionaries’ political views seem to have taken the opposite tack rightward. Robert, from Argentina, who served in the early FFLM days (1971-73) discussed that even the most successful social programs for the poor only reach one person or family at a time, the aid from which ends when the program ends; therefore, conversion one person or family at a time is more efficacious. Patty recited another common saying in Mormonism: “Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him to fish and he eats every day.” In Mormon welfare programs, no one is typically given a handout; rather it is a “hand-up” for which they trade labor or service. The LDS teach

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59 Ibid.

60 Interview transcript, RMM, dated June 25, 2008.

and expect self-reliance, and most of these RMs view poverty as a failure to take personal responsibility.

In 1976 a conference held at BYU addressed these “enduring issues” of Mormonism’s global expansion especially since post-World War II. In addition to the African priesthood prohibition (resolved two years later), and no proselytizing allowed in the communist world (resolved in the early 1990s), the most problematic and enduring issues remain culture and poverty. In the conference there was the acknowledgement of “a kind of cultural imperialism” as problematic where American saints struggled to differentiate between the “essentials of their faith and the cultural baggage they were carrying” (Allen 1992:14). These enduring cultural issues include language, translation, and ethnic issues; leadership and institutional development; and retention (Tullis 1978). These cultural issues are still problematic today, although with more members having been retained as the church has matured in many areas, local leadership has also developed to handle many of these cultural difficulties. Local (native) leaders are much better positioned to deal with their members’ cultural problems than are Anglo American leaders. Cultural problems in the LDS Church today including “values conflicts and leadership style” are best negotiated at the local level of leadership (Reynolds 1978:15-16).

Equally enduring are the difficulties of “temporal wellbeing” (Tullis 1978). The LDS seemed poised during the 1970s to address the problem of structural inequalities, at least through education. President Harold B. Lee (1972-1973) said it would be difficult “for an illiterate member to follow the admonition to read the scriptures” (Tullis 1978:100). But despite the Mexican success in education (Tullis 1978), global
education was too ambitious and the experiment ended. Experiments in health missionaries ended. Since then, other than very small individual service projects such as helping to paint a house, proselytizing missionaries are confined to proclaiming the gospel. There has emerged in Mormon mission a rigid division of labor between proselytizing missionaries and all others, such as health, human services, and relief efforts most all of which are conducted by senior missionaries after retirement.

In numerous conversations through the past decade among the Mormons in the FFLM, there is a general current of thought that suggests poverty and underdevelopment are a “state of mind” (Harrison 2000) attributable to bad personal choices made within maladaptive cultures in the tradition of Banfield (1958), Landes (1998), Harrison (2000), and Harrison and Huntington (2001). Sorenson argues that culture is a “kind of vessel” through which the content of the (purportedly culturally-neutral) Mormon gospel is transmitted; and some cultures are “apparently superior” (1978:30). This approach, which attributes structural inequalities to individuals’ collective choices and their cultures, overlooks centuries of oppression of the hemisphere’s people of color, including the Lamanites and theft of their native lands.

Such a view denies the efficacy of political solutions and redistributions of land and wealth, which for some Mormons are patently unfair and rob a successful person of his wealth and freedom or incentive to achieve. On one hand, it is understandable why some active Mormons are against redistributive taxation because they give ten percent to their church, along with a monthly fasting tithe for the poor, contributions to the Perpetual Education Fund for poor students, and to numerous humanitarian and relief causes around the nation and the world, among others. On the other hand, where there
is opposition to political redress of social inequalities, the long term human cost of suffering is wrenching although little discussed among these Mormons. Despite political and development efforts, and grass roots social change, nothing has ameliorated centuries of cumulative undeserved impoverishment and enrichment (Feagin 2001).

A critique of the temporal needs of millions of Latin American members is making its way into the progressive wing of writings in the Mormon Blogosphere, which is a line of inquiry for future research. Early Mormonism was a profound critique of capitalism and its implications for the poor; it was an economic utopian movement to establish the kingdom of God on earth (Arrington 1958; Pitzer 1997). The Mormon history of the Law of Consecration and Stewardship and its communal Utah experiment, the United Order, redistributed and leveled wealth among Mormons, many of whom were indigent immigrants subsidized by the church for gathering in Zion. Under the presidency of Joseph F. Smith (1901-1918), he admonished that “a religion which cannot save a man temporally cannot hope to save him spiritually” (Tullis 1978:99). But the communal vision of the church was eradicated at the turn of the century by the federal crisis over polygamy, which along with plural wives, jettisoned collectivism (Alexander 1986). The church’s emphasis is now on self-reliance and personal progress, which are considered gospel principles, and any failings are generally thought to be the individuals and their maladaptive cultures. However, the church also emphasizes free will contributions and a monthly fast offering on behalf of humanitarian charity and welfare for those in need of relief, a feature of the church known worldwide (Baron 2008; Magnum and Blumell 1993).
Generally, it appears that Mormons have an ambiguous relationship with culture. Where there is any concern about the cultural implications of religious switching, Mormons believe they alone possess the one and only true church to which people convert, which makes any difficulties or sacrifices worth the rewards. In conversations with active missionaries presented earlier in this work, some take the approach that all human cultures possess some truth, but only the Mormon gospel culture gives them the ‘fulness’ of truth. In other words, in this line of thinking conversion is the process of “adding to” the culture they already have rather than asking them to leave their cultures and, if necessary, families who cling to those cultures behind. Conversely, Joseph Smith warned that human cultures are the “chains, and shackles, and fetters of hell” and insofar as cultures are human constructions, the Mormon ‘gospel culture’ is “essentially subversive of the world view perpetuated by the cultures of man” that are inherently false (Reynolds 1978:9). There appears among some LDS to be a general conflation of Mormon culture with what they call ‘gospel culture’ with God’s chosen culture possessed by his chosen people. Discussions of the minimal essentials of Mormonism that could unite all cultures are considered among these members as simple as doctrines. Yet, “there have been few efforts at authoritative articulations of the precise content of this “minimal Mormonism,” at least for the church membership at large” (Mauss 1996:245). In accordance with Mauss, another veteran LDS scholar and ethnographer of ethnic groups Jessie Embry writes that differentiating between gospel and culture is a “topic that will continue to be hotly debated” (1992b:95).

In the mission field where Mormon-American culture encounters the “other” it is difficult to disaggregate the Mormon teachings from their American packaging. Like
other American missionaries, they, too, export an American gospel (Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose 1996), although Mormons have a unique claim to American origins in Joseph Smith. But despite the fact God restored the church in the U.S., “the challenge that is raised for the dominant cultural group of the Church, the Americans, is to recognize that they have inherited a culture, developed over the last centuries, that is not identical with the gospel” (Reynolds 1978:18). Nevertheless, disaggregation of American from restored gospel is nearly impossible. And yet, the church must help its members hold the line against threatening and encroaching global secular culture, “stripping our beliefs and cultural symbols of their sacred or divine elements” (Reynolds 1978:18). In the narratives of these returned missionaries, the other cultures they encountered were often the source of troubled lives to be overcome and left behind as paths away from God. And yet, there are some attributes associated with Latin American culture that the Mormons find affinity with such as family-centrism, and strong paternalism, which integrates well with Mormon patriarchal culture. Ultimately, the implications of cultural encounters are to be resolved in the model of Paul to the early church in letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians (1978:13-14), which is to say, all are to be “one in Christ.”

Where authentic conversion is successful, the new Latter-day Saint makes and keeps covenants, which are necessary to being one in Christ. Consolidating a conversion and retaining the member requires successful fellowshipping, home and visiting teaching, a calling, and friends, or “fitting into the LDS religio-ethnic community of saints” (Shipps 2001a:74). The new member and her family will learn to strive for perfection in everyday life, guided by the Holy Ghost and the prophet, with the support
of the stake community. Retention of new members revitalizes the local branches and wards, provides sufficient local leadership to fill layers and layers of stake positions. Solid retention efforts, as importantly, frees up the proselytizing missionary corps to do their specialized job – proclaim the gospel. Where successful, the new Mormon will grow in leadership capacity and start a new lineage of belief and service in a new family, serving as the next generation of missionaries and leaders. Transforming the Americas into the kingdom of God, one convert at a time, missionaries facilitate new family lineage of belief and service in a chain of memory.

Returned missionaries are an admired group among Mormon members; they are the quintessential reference group who see themselves as God’s messengers. Their transformative field experiences are often recalled from exotic places, among “other” peoples such as Lamanites and Catholics. Inviting all people to come unto Christ, they did their best to restore the sacred covenant, which provides protection and meaning in a chaotic world. For those new members who successfully acculturated and were retained, they joined this covenant people by making reciprocal baptismal promises to continue the missionary work, raise Mormon families, and build stakes in Zion throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Mission experiences gave the RMs a window into the human condition, where cultures interact, and personal agency is exercised as people undergo profound life change through conversions.

For the RMs in this study, the collective missionary experiences validate church teachings of self-reliance, agency, and church service for their fellow humans. Helping establish pioneer stakes, their proselytizing missions impress their very identity or master status as Mormon. In the mission they learned leadership and companionship
skills. Returning home, they will serve as a reference group for other aspiring young missionaries, and their mission companionships helped prepare them for partnerships in temple marriages raising their children – “little investigators” – to become the next generation missionaries. In this way, they keep and make covenants, perpetuating lineages of belief and service. A common saying among Mormons is “by their fruits you will know them” which is to say the life of the active Mormon will bear fruits that provide testimony to the truth. If their exemplary adult lives are testament to the fruits of their mission experiences, then all Mormons will want for their children to serve missions. Informed by their missions, these RMs’ everyday families lives are considered in Chapter 12.
CHAPTER 12
PERFECTING SAINTS IN ZION: FAMILY LIVES

As of year-end 2002, the FFLM consisted of five stakes, two Spanish-speaking and three English, totaling a membership of 14,749; Pompano Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Homestead are English-speaking with Anglo American stake presidents, and Miami Lakes and Miami Spanish both have Hispanic presidents. But by September 2008, the FFLM stakes were again reorganized. The Miami Spanish Stake was dissolved and stake boundaries redrawn to consolidate four stakes; Pompano Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami South have Anglo American stake presidents, and Miami Lakes is under a Hispanic president. This reconfiguration represented the first time since 1994 that this heavily Hispanic mission would no longer have a Spanish-designated stake. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this reorganization was necessitated to enhance proficiency in leadership, according to one mission leader, due to insufficient leadership in the Miami Spanish stake. Nevertheless, growth continues and by year end 2009, the mission held four stakes with an official membership of 26,605. Although official LDS membership numbers have been demonstrated to constitute an over-count when compared with self-reporting data in the U. S. (Phillips and Cragun 2011), the increase in membership has been substantial enough to warrant the October 2009 announcement of a new temple in the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission to be located within the Fort Lauderdale Stake. The temple will serve south Florida and the Bahamas.¹

Stakes leaders are responsible for implementing the multi-layered programs of the church. These participants have crossed international borders, and resettled in

Mormon stakes, such as the four in the FFLM where they are serving their callings and raising families. In these stakes, members and their families “work out their salvation” as they strive to help each other and perfect the saints. The family is the most important work a Mormon will ever do, as “the unit of exaltation” (Shipps 1987:149). President Benson instructed on the “major purpose of the stakes”: “They are organized to assist parents who have “children in Zion” to teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ and administer the ordinances of salvation. Stakes are formed to perfect the saints, and that development begins in the home with effective gospel instruction” (Benson 1991). Returned missionary families are more deeply religious by all measures than their non-RM peers (Chadwick, Top, and McClendon 2010) and more likely to perpetuate the faith as a chain of memory in lineages of missionaries. This chapter includes the importance of ‘callings’ and the RMs post-mission lives in the FFLM. Along with their church assignments, these RMs finished their educations, married for time and eternity in Mormon temples, are raising their families as the next generation of active Mormons, and redeeming their dead. Toward an understanding of their level of committed but typical lives, their narratives of daily family life and Family Home Evening provide a picture of how they juggle church and family. Finally, the participants have constructed family lineages of belief and service. Two couples, all four of whom served missions, provide a compilation of their lives of service. Together these narratives provide a picture of Mormon membership in the lives of the covenant people. By all accounts, these RMs are “becoming goodly parents” as in the Book of Mormon (Perry 2012) through covenant marriages (Hafen 1996).
Perfecting Saints through Callings

The participants in this study have settled in the FFLM’s local stakes, within congregational wards and branches, raising their families. The local stakes are the location where the particular Mormon covenant is universalized, which is to say that within the stakes the boundaries of belonging are expanded to new people at the same time the boundaries of belief are protected to insure correct doctrine. Said another way, anyone can join the covenant people as long as they believe and behave pursuant to the correct doctrine, enforced by the leadership. The balancing of these tensions resides in the stake presidencies and their ward bishops who oversee the faithful. New members are perfected in the faith community and retained, old members are reactivated, and active members are maintained, or not. In the ideal, all members are active and there is no slippage along the continuum of membership commitment. But because membership and adherence are fluid, it is within the stake that this leadership is critical for shepherding members. Although individuals and families are expected to be as self-reliant as possible, the LDS system fosters a corporate community of believers who take action on behalf of helping perfect one another. Perfecting the saints helps in the cause of retention. Paraphrasing Pres. Hinckley, new members need a friend, a calling, and the good word of God. The same can be said for all members.

Callings are the activities on behalf of the community that help perfect the saints at the same time they help perfect the individual undertaking them. Mormons are called, in the Weberian sense, to fulfill particular tasks in accordance with God’s will, which they know through continuing revelation. “[T]he fulfillment of one’s duties in the world
constitutes, under all circumstances, the only way to please God. This fulfillment, and only this, is God’s will” (Weber 2002:39-41). For active Mormons, serving voluntary callings are the lifeblood of the faithful community – every time a calling is served, it keeps a covenant to help perfect all the saints in their stakes in Zion. All appointments in the church are known as callings whether to the First Presidency or the stake cannery. They fall into one of three categories: the priesthood for all worthy males; specific “charges to Church members to take certain actions” such as the missionary efforts or church governance; or the most typical member calling, discussed here, involving positions in local stakes, wards, and branches.2 As a lay church, “the bulk of the work of the LDS Church gets done as church members exercise the “callings” extended to them by their priesthood leaders” (Shipps 2000e:279). Some callings, such as stake presidencies discussed later in this study, are obviously high profile and require substantial leadership and personnel skills. Of all the leadership responsibilities, members’ transgressions are “the more difficult issues in the units [and] are referred up to the stake presidency for counseling” and in the worst case, disciplinary action.3 Sometimes, however, member problems are first identified by ‘home teachers’ or ‘visiting teachers.’

The unsung callings of home teaching (undertaken by the priesthood) and visiting teaching (by the Relief Society) are the tasks on the front lines where members, in support of each other, help to keep one another in the faith, and on the straight and narrow path. Home and visiting teaching, as commitment mechanisms, provides the

2 However, if a calling such as a General Authority is a permanent full-time position, there is financial support.

3 Interview transcript RMB, dated April 14, 2008.
“important surveillance” to be sure all members are staying active and worthy (Shepherd and Shepherd 1984:116-117). Dean explained these callings as follows:

These may be among the most obvious ways in which members attempt to strengthen and serve each other. I have always had a home teaching assignment to visit three to five families, ideally on a monthly basis, sharing a short lesson with them and generally helping to support them in whatever needs they might have. [Victoria] has similarly had visiting teaching assignments to other women. 4

Dean explained that the original intention was to visit every family monthly. However, it depends on an area’s needs. “Where there are fewer active members to visit a large number of less active ones, the emphasis is now on visiting most frequently those who need it most—the new members, the widows, those wanting to get back into church activity, and those with other specific needs.” For those who are very active in the church, or for those who prefer no visits at all, time is better spent where there is a greater need. 5

Three guidelines direct home teaching: teachers are to “know as well as possible the people they are called to teach;” they are to have a teaching lesson prepared to be delivered as early in the month as possible; and be on call in the event subsequent follow-ups are necessary. In this way, they are to ‘magnify their callings.’ The home teachers go in pairs, often an Aaronic priesthood holder (age twelve to eighteen) along with a senior Melchizedek priesthood holder, to regularly assigned families. These teaching assignments often identify the first occasion of welfare needs, and problems or difficulties for members.

4 Email correspondence dated October 13, 2009 in possession of the author.

5 Email correspondence dated October 13, 2009 in possession of the author.
Inactivity and unworthiness can be grounds for discipline in a suspended or revoked temple recommend, pending repentance. In the worst cases, disfellowshipping means the loss of member privileges including the loss of callings; and excommunication is to be cut off from covenant membership altogether (Shepherd and Shepherd 1984:118-119). One bishop said, “The only time you get to the point of excommunicating somebody is when they are flagrantly acting in violation of church doctrines and principles.” A sister RM sees the excommunication as an opportunity more than a sanction: “The excommunication often helps people come back – I don’t know about people staying out – but sometimes it helps you get your life back in order. That’s the reason for excommunication; like a wakeup call.” For the bishop, when people are trying, the leaders work with them toward recovered worthiness. “And people get confused, but when people are working through the issues, you can be discreet working in other channels to help them on this aspect of personal worthiness.” He said the most important thing is to make sure people know what is expected of them in joining the church, so they are prepared to qualify for a temple recommend.

The bishop and stake president’s power of discernment come from the “keys” of priesthood authority. “The keys are specific to a calling. The bishop has specific keys in the calling for the ward, for the discernment for what should be done. Maybe a person comes in to confess a sin, you rely on that spiritual discernment to know how best to move forward.” In his ward of about 300-400 members, of whom about one hundred attend services, he is responsible for their worthiness interviews. “The bishop signs off on the temple recommend every two years and then they go to the stake

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6 Interview transcript, RSD, dated February 24, 2008.
presidency. Our ward is pretty small, so I do them all.” A ‘priesthood interview’ is required of all callings where the member submits to a personally intrusive interview conducted typically by the ward bishop, and if need be, the stake president. These interviews include interrogating the member’s testament to levels of activity, sustaining of church leaders, compliance with the Word of Wisdom, law of chastity, and tithing.

Missionary and temple interviews are far more rigorous. A bishop in an English Ward in the Miami Spanish Stake described the process for young men and women advancing toward missionary work.

We interview from twelve years up at least two times a year or more, we’re interviewing all the young men and women. The bishop should be interviewing a minimum of one time a year, and when they get to be sixteen, I interview two times a year to see how they are doing. So, I interview them several times during that process for worthiness; then the Stake President interviews them for worthiness. Assuming the aspiring missionary is deemed worthy, he or she submits the application which goes first to the bishop, then the stake president and onto the missionary committee in Salt Lake City. For this bishop, his overwhelming concern is for the anticipatory socialization of the young men as the next generation of missionaries. From age twelve, these young men have been selected to participate in the priesthood home teaching system. They have seen firsthand members at all levels of activity and compliance, and they have learned a very valuable leadership skill of surveillance and confidentiality, which will serve them well in future missions and leadership positions.

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7 Interview transcript dated June 23, 2008.
8 Interview transcript dated April 8, 2008.
Whether by the priesthood or the women, these teaching assignments serve to organize effective communications and resources at all levels from the member to the stake presidency. These callings also provide abundant support not only to the members but to the bishops and stake presidents to whom these tasks would otherwise fall. Home and visiting teaching is best utilized where people actually have needs or problems that could impair their memberships – new members, inactive members, and women without a priesthood holder in the family. Home teaching and visiting teaching are callings that many members serve concurrently with unit positions. The callings Mormons serve help perfect each other as they hold one another accountable to keeping their covenants. Reporting up the chain, they are ultimately accountable to their stake presidents.

**Post-Mission Lives**

Striving for perfection is aided by making and keeping covenants, which has implications for everyday life. Perfection “is a catch-all category potentially covering almost any church activity which doesn’t fall into the missionary or temple work categories,” ⁹ which is a consensus among this group of participants. The stake leaders are instructed, “Perfecting the Saints includes encouraging and helping each member live the gospel each day to prepare for exaltation. Perfecting the Saints has both a spiritual dimension and a temporal dimension” (*Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders’ Guidebook* 2001:Introduction). Maintaining balance in all things temporal and spiritual is the difficult part, which is a gradual process in the eternal lifespan of the Mormon. Each leader has been called by the Church and sustained by the membership in their

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⁹ Email in author’s possession dated October 13, 2009.
capacity to serve. They are to ‘magnify their callings,’ and minister to one another. By living a faithful and balanced model, the leaders provide an example of righteous living as a reference group and master status for all their members to follow. All members are to attend sacrament and all meetings, fast, and study scriptures and follow all prophetic teachings. In support of families and their individuals, the leaders are to strengthen the home as the most important place for spiritual and temporal teachings. As leaders, they are to teach families to live within their means, practice self-reliance and preparedness, submit to the law of tithing, and “assign home and visiting teachers to watch over and help them” (Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders’ Guidebook 2001:3). Additionally, leaders are to help the poor and needy, encouraging members to do the same.

Because for Mormons the temporal and the spiritual are not discrete spheres, perfection includes both, and all ‘edifying activity’ now accrues to the eternal perfection of the individual. To become godly is to strive toward sinlessness, which is the theological root of Mormon earthly success (Stark 2001: 232). Perfection as success is internalized early as youngsters are socialized in anticipation of being worthy to serve missions. Serving missions, they strive for perfection in spiritual motivations, in their testimonies, in the acquisition of foreign languages, in leadership positions, and in returning home with honor, having served with valor. Once home, striving toward perfection in all things also includes attainment of knowledge, leading to high rates of education, which has been demonstrated to increase religiosity among the LDS (Albrecht and Heaton 1984) and is born out in this group of returned missionaries. The cumulative effect of internalized high achievement, coupled with the discipline of covenant demands (Word of Wisdom, law of chastity, and tithing), yields RMs who are
top-tier candidates for multi-national corporations (Benedict 2007), and the upper levels of government requiring the highest security clearances.

Wrapping up their missions,¹⁰ at least sixteen of the RMs returned to study at BYU, with the remainder returning to higher education at various campuses in Florida, demonstrating the Mormon affinity for education. Among this group there are at least four doctorates, five master’s degrees, sixteen undergraduate degrees, and three closing in on associate’s degrees with the intention of finishing bachelor’s degrees. This group includes professors, attorneys, accountants, professionals in construction and design, computer specialists in IT, businessmen, and FBI. Of the six women who studied at BYU, two reported studying in programs called “family sciences,” one of whom completed her bachelor’s. Victoria has more than a year of credits at BYU, and has taken several courses in community college while raising twelve children; and Patty completed three years at BYU.

Of these nineteen missionaries who were married at the time of the first interviews, they had married endogamously following their missions often having met future spouses at BYU.¹¹ For the most part, their marital divisions of labor demonstrate the LDS norm of male breadwinners, and female homemakers, or if necessary some part-time or work from home among the women. Of the six single young men originally interviewed, three had since married within three years of their return and two have two children each. Another RM was engaged to a girl in Utah, planning a Salt Lake City

¹⁰ All statistics for this group are compiled from their collective interviews and demographic profiles.

¹¹ A high degree of endogamy is consistent with Mormons in America (2012), which shows Mormons marry inside their faith at rates higher (85 percent) than Protestants (81 percent, although marriage among differentiated Protestants is not demonstrated) or Catholics (78 percent). LDS divorce rates are only five to ten percent behind the US national average of 50 percent; working mothers are in the workforce at the same rate as other women; and birth control is used by LDS and non-LDS women at the same rate, 80.5 percent (Stewart 2007:29).
temple wedding. One RM father sent his son who is also an RM to BYU to “hopefully find a wife.” Having sealed their marriages for time and eternity in the temple these returned missionaries have raised and are raising good sized families; at least seventy-five children and counting among these fifteen active families. Of those who were childless, five young men were newly married without children, engaged, or single after a recent mission return. The returned missionaries, having come from active missionary families, are well on their way to perpetuating lineages of belief in their young children, and future children, the next generation of missionaries.

The participants are serving a variety of callings in their branches, wards, and stakes in the FFLM. The post-mission younger single men in their mid-twenties are volunteering in the Young Singles Ward in a variety of roles that foster leadership experience, such as branch or ward clerk, Elder’s Quorum President, First Counselor of the Elder’s Quorum; one RM is serving concurrently as his ward’s web master and secretary, a home teacher, and an Elder’s Quorum teacher. The RMs in their mid-thirties are serving as Scoutmaster, Ward Mission Leader, in Primary, and music. In this group of participants, branch presidents, ward bishops, and stake presidents are in their forties and fifties. While several of the elders in this group have served as branch presidents, ward bishops, stake presidents, and mission presidents throughout the Americas, four stake presidents (three current and one recent past) are RMs (stake

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12 This small group of RMs has families of 12, 11, 7, 5, 4 and as few as two or three children, and some have yet to begin families. Larger families are among the older RMs; subsequent generations among Mormon families are getting smaller as is the national trend. LDS families have almost three children where others average less than two children; ideal family size for Mormons is about four children while for other Americans it is about three children (Heaton, Goodman, and Holman 2001:98). Despite LDS family size responding to national trends, given the theological importance of the family, pronatalism remains a general Mormon cultural norm and a “distinctive feature” (Heaton 1992:1524).
leadership is in Chapter 13). Along with their callings, they are raising and perfecting families in stakes in Zion.

All Latter-day men and women juggle family lives and church lives, where in this church, the two are nearly inseparable. For some members, the demands are difficult; for others, they take it all in stride. In what follows is a window into a typical family's weekly life, the struggles to find balance, and the aspirations. The next section takes up the Monday Family Home Evening, the one night per week that LDS set aside for only the family. The chapter ends with profiles of two families – one with deep pioneer roots and the other a first generation Argentinean-American convert family. In both cases, the families are perpetuating missionary lineages of different lengths, and connecting with their kindred dead through temple work. The church and the family are forever entwined.

**Typical Latter-day Family Lives**

Mormons are a busy people, an active people. All church and family wholesome activity accrues toward perfection. Allen, a high councilor in the Fort Lauderdale Stake, who converted and served in Spain is married to an RM, shared a typical LDS family week:\textsuperscript{13} Starting the week on Sundays, Allen is up by 5 a.m. and at church by 6 a.m. for the High Council Meeting. He, his wife and three teenagers attend Sacrament Services, followed by Sunday school and the ward priesthood meeting. Serving on the Stake High Council includes travel to various wards and branches throughout the stake, 

\textsuperscript{13} This entire section, up to Family Home Evening, is taken from the interview transcript with RMS dated June 29, 2008. Although Allen served outside the Americas, his mission to Spain among Catholics was nevertheless of interest since most all the converts encountered in both studies are Catholic. Further, he was recommended by his peers in the snowball sample as a particularly good stake high priest. He turned out to be a key participant, sitting for two interviews, June 20, 2007 and June 29, 2008, and we exchanged emails and phone calls over the course of the fieldwork.
depending on additional assignments. His added assignments include the Creole Branch, and the Young Men. “There is a Stake Young Men’s President, but I’m the advisor from the stake to Young Men.” This service takes about ten hours per week. For most Mormons, Sundays are generally a three-hour block; for him and others serving high leadership in the stakes and wards, the responsibilities might take most of the day. “If I don’t have other meetings then we get to have dinner on Sunday evening together.” He continued about the competing demands and the support role of his wife. He travels “up to eighty percent” of his time, through Latin America and the Caribbean for the past two and a half years.

I probably leave home and my wife’s a widow, holding down the fort, and I’m so proud of her. If she was here speaking, a typical week for her [would be]: “I’m here by myself holding down the fort. And when he’s home, he’s running to church meetings.” So that is a typical week, and with the job right now, I do yard work on Saturdays.14

He filled in the week for his family. “If I’m traveling we try and do Family Home Evening on Sunday, but pretty much she’ll do it on Monday.” His high schoolers go to seminary at six or seven a.m. and then high school. One night a week, depending on the unit, his son has Young Men and his daughter has Young Women, and he added it is “that way all around the world and if kids are in college, they go to Institute.” LDS couples are encouraged to have a Friday night “date night.” “On Friday night, Pam and I are spending the evening together; Saturday yard work; Sunday start all over again.”

For the LDS it is a “total way of life; not a Sunday only commitment. Tell me what kind of time you tithe per week.” The time required varies by calling and the

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14 Saturdays are also from time to time set aside for larger community service projects among wards or stakes, such as Habitat for Humanity, which from informal conversations with Allen, I am aware he participates in. Such ‘outside projects’ help to dispel the stereotype of Mormons as insular.
balance is precarious. He described his wife’s work as a Seminary teacher requiring fifteen hours per week. Other callings might be as few weekly hours as three. For the bishop however, “it is thirty hours per week.” The “Relief Society President may be thirty hours a week, because you’re over all [the stake] with the women. So there’s a time and a season, and you answer the call.” Additionally, the men do “home teaching; the women do visiting teaching about eight hours a week.” In retrospect, he went on, “And so, one of the interesting things is, dependent on callings, if I look back over our twenty-two years of marriage, it is a real balance between the church and the family that is so important. It is hard to look someone in the eye and say, ‘we’re really family oriented’ and then to say, ‘well, I only spend four hours a week with my family.’”

**Balancing Church and Family**

Having conducted fieldwork on many occasions since 2003, there is an apparent contradiction in what is considered a family-centric church where men spend a large amount of time away from the family due to church responsibilities. When asked if this balance is a tension in the church, Allen said frankly,

Yes, it is. It depends on where the people are (or the couple is) about answering the call. Because I can be off spending twenty to thirty hours a week, having great spiritual experiences, while my wife is sitting at home with a five, three, and one year old going through the grind, and saying, “did I really sign up for all of this?” In my particular circumstance, I have a lady who I know unequivocally answers the call. She has never complained in twenty-two years about my being gone, whatever it is. She just buckles down and gets through it.

He continued, “I’m sure she’s had her moments” but she has never groused openly to him. Church leaders admonish men in General Conferences to focus on the priorities. But in both case studies, a readily apparent method for balancing has been elusive; all of the men in the studies are meeting these difficult demands. He said leaders tell them, “Brother, focus on what really needs to be done. It won’t do you any good to go
do all this stuff and then in the end not have a family. Again, no success outside compensates for failure in the home.” Having met with other families on occasions of FHE and General Conference, several participants recall the admonition of former President David O. McKay that “no other success can compensate for failure in the home.”

He explains that a person has to be smarter and wiser, and in retrospect it probably would not have hurt to miss a church meeting.

The balance is in the perspective of service and sacrifice and it must be a couple’s vision together. He explains that non-LDS families have similar struggles if for different priorities.

But there are a lot of family men who aren’t members of this church who work from eight to five and spend evenings and Sundays with their families. And I think the majority of men don’t spend time with their families. But there are some that do, and good for them, instead of going to a bar or golfing or football. You have to make your own priorities.

For LDS members the General Authorities serves as a reference group. If they can balance church and family, surely any man can. “I think about the Apostles and their travel all over the world, and President Hinckley’s travel. Sister Hinckley raised those kids pretty much. Was President Hinckley a family man? I’m sure he was. But if you looked at it from the amount of hours – a family man? When was there time?” He also mentioned the model of his stake president, in a most demanding calling, with a demanding career, a supportive wife and five children. The two couples are best friends as well, so they find mutual support in friendship – the men in the priesthood and their wives in sisterhood. Lamenting as most parents do the rapid rate at which children grow up, he continued with gratitude the role of his wife,

Our kids are almost gone now – number two is out the door heading for a mission, and number three a junior now. Then they’re gone. You must have a balance, and if you don’t have that spouse . . . because I’ve known a few spouses [wives] who don’t seem to answer the call, and the poor guy is trying to do his church calling and getting hammered at home, and wow, that is tough.

In Allen’s assessment, between the competing poles of church and family, the man is more likely to displease his wife than his priestly peers, or she may be more likely to express it. The church leaders’ rhetoric rolls the programs and family all into one common unit of priestly concern and then asks the men to prioritize between the two. Disaggregating the two is very difficult. Resolving this tension won’t necessarily go away when the children graduate. Like other active Mormons, Allen and Pam intend to continue service when he retires.

We’ll go wherever they want us. So, there’s a joke between Pam and I: I want to do five or six of these things [senior missions] and I just want to keep doing them. And Pam says, ‘Well, I want to go see my grandchildren, so you may have to go by yourself,’ laughingly. But of course, we’ll work it out to do both. But I mean, for me, I can’t think of anything better than this.\(^\text{16}\)

**Family Home Evening**

Arriving for Family Home Evening\(^\text{17}\) at the Fort Lauderdale Stake President’s home, his wife Debra was putting the finishing touches on chicken and pasta as Christian was making a large tossed salad. Having helped in the preparations, sons Tim (sixteen), Brad (fourteen), Mike (twelve), and John (five), and daughter Jennifer (ten) joined around the table where we all gathered for a blessing by their father, who holds the high priesthood for the family. Following dinner and clean up, we went to the great room for Monday night Family Home Evening (FHE), instituted in 1915. Like the

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\(^\text{16}\) Interview transcript RMS dated June 29, 2008.

\(^\text{17}\) Interview transcript RMA, dated February 25, 2008. This section on FHE is taking entirely from this transcript.
stake high priest just discussed, this stake president and his wife are keenly aware of
the balancing act that is required of the highest local leadership, which demands so
much of the father's time away from the family. Monday nights are therefore sacred
time, with a church manual published online to aid families in its conduct (*Family Home
Evening Resource Book* 1997). The first page is the almost-doctrinal First Presidency's
“Family Proclamation to the World” followed by thirty-seven scripture based lessons for
the evening, lesson themes, along with activities and ideas for strengthening families.18

The FHE meeting, brought to order as are most LDS meetings in the manner of
business protocol, was conducted by five-year-old John, who asked his brother Mike to
open with a prayer. At the close of the prayer, Jennifer, their daughter made her
mission intentions clear, “I hope they call me on a mission!” The meeting continued with
an exchange of family announcements for this upcoming week; demands at school,
church meetings, and schedules, all looking to Debra as the family coordinator. The
level of activity in this family is mind-boggling. There is no idle time for anyone.

The topic of the night's FHE is serving a mission. Recalling his Canadian
mission, Christian gave his family mission lineage: a grandfather called in Prussia, his
father to Shreveport, Louisiana in the Southern States Mission, one brother in the
Central American Mission including San Jose, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Nicaragua,
another brother in Recife, Brazil, a brother called to a Spanish-speaking mission in San
Antonio, one in Rochester, NY; his parents serving a senior mission in Anchorage,
Alaska. Debra's family missionary tradition included her father's grandfather's service in

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18 While doing research I was on the list-serve of the Fourth Ward's Relief Society. A few days prior to
Mondays, an email went out to all the women with ideas for Family Home Evening. These communiqués
included recipes, craft or game ideas, songs, and other helpful suggestions for incorporating with the
scriptural lessons scheduled.
Tennessee, her father’s father also served in the Southern States Mission, her father in Norway for three years; on her mother’s side, her father was in the military and her only brother served in St. Louis, Missouri; additionally, she has three brothers who served missions, one in North Carolina, another in Salt Lake City, and one in Santo Domingo.

Debra and Christian’s four sons are expecting to serve and there seems to be no single question about it; neither does Jennifer sound undecided. Tim at age sixteen is anxiously anticipating the call. Remembering the exemplary service of his forefathers Christian was touched as he spoke of the early days of mission, “without purse or scrip” – meaning that like the early apostles, his grandfather traveled without money and preached with notes. Along with his family members, RMs in his home stake were influential, providing an important reference group – only the Mormons are chosen to advance “the Lord’s work.”

Following one year at BYU awaiting his mission call, Christian read continually from the Book of Mormon. Reading also *Jesus the Christ* by James Talmage and from John 21:17, he was most moved by Jesus telling Peter: “Feed my sheep.” At that moment he understood that “all young men are called to serve, to share the gospel.” It was the moment his testimony “was assured.” Having saved $1,000-1,500 to “get on his way” his parents and grandmother helped fund the balance of his mission. His letter came from President Ezra Taft Benson, calling him to the Plains of Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Once at the MTC in Provo, he knew for sure the mission call was divine, called to Canada he would serve in English – unlike all his brothers, foreign language was not his strong suit. A letter and booklet from his mission president instructed on the purpose of the mission, to “save souls,” which would require the right attitude, and
“twenty-four pages of guidelines!” Called from June 1986 to 1988, he labored among the middle-class Canadian Methodists and Catholics.

Investigators in his area didn’t come as readily as that experienced by, for example, his brother in Recife, where he was involved in some 400 Brazilian baptisms. Long before members provided referrals, he and his companions sought divine inspiration, as they tracted from door to door.

So, [my companion] and I are out in Canada in January, February with our big parkas on and we are “spiritual harvesting.” Trying to listen to the spirit. Where shall we go? What street should we go on? Which house should we knock on? And we’re walking down the street, and we’re asking each other, “how are you feeling?” He says, “Well, I’ve got a shiver going down my back, but I don’t know if it’s the Spirit or if I’m just freezing cold!” Well, I started laughing right in the middle of the street! it was so funny! A journal entry from January 22 read minus thirty-five degrees.

Christian served with ten different companions, under a mission president from Australia. He shared a few artifacts from his mission; a Canadian flag, his journal and the wind chill charts, and “missionary meals in minutes.” Foreshadowing his professional life as an accountant, he spent part of his mission in the mission office as financial clerk. His mission in Canada was a very “Midwest experience.” Whether Canada or the FFLM, he finds Catholic converts to be good LDS members, which is a recurrent theme among Mormons. The school evening getting late, we wrapped up with a prayer.

Christian’s mission service also foreshadowed his work as a stake president, preparing him for his leadership calling. In addition to the financial expertise from the mission office, which has served him well in the presidency and his career, most importantly, his mission taught him the gravitas of “inviting all to come unto Christ.” He is the one stake president who emphasized no matter what the activity of the three-fold
mission, the point is to save souls by invitation. Of all the stake presidents, he also most often stresses the role of the Holy Ghost in facilitating the mission. The Holy Ghost in communication with the missionaries provides the power of teaching. As stake president, it is his responsibility to find investigators and encourage all stake members to find interested people to teach.

President Hinckley has had a vision where he said, ‘I have seen two or three, five times the number of people join the church than we have now.’ And we sustained him as a prophet, seer, and revelator. So, if he has had the vision open to him of the beginning and the end, like Moses did, and John did in the New Testament, and other prophets, he has seen the day when there will be a million or 1.5 million, tens of millions join the church per year. It’s just us. Us, casting our net.”

As will be demonstrated in his service as a stake president resumed in Chapter 13, Christian is a very hands-on stake president, taking keen responsibility for the spiritual lives of all of his stake members.

**Family Lineages of Belief and Service**

As would be expected, all of the participants in this study expect and will encourage their sons to serve missions as the next generation of global proselytizers; some will also encourage their daughters but won’t expect service. Of the five RM households with children old enough to serve, all of the sons have done so while the daughters have split, some serving before marriage. One RM couple, both having served, has three sons and three daughters who served; five daughters married and another son served in the U. S. military. Eight children have married RMs; and the first three grandchildren of fifty-eight have come of age to serve missions in Minneapolis, Denver, and Phoenix. Among the twelve RMs who were the first generation of

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19 Interview transcript RMA, dated June 23, 2008.
missionaries in their families, it is their intention to have started their own family lineage of missionaries by their example. Without exception, they all said they would encourage their sons to serve, most encouraging daughters to marry first and serve later, which is the preference of the Church. The additional leaders (a mission president, two stake presidents, two from the Relief Society, a high council priest, the Bishop’s Storehouse Director, and a ward bishop) are perpetuating their family missionary traditions by expecting their sons to serve missions and the four age-eligible sons have done so. Two daughters have chosen marriage over mission as is the church’s preference, and another eleven children are too young but nevertheless encouraged. As much as this first generation of missionaries wants their children to serve, there is nevertheless some worry.

Allen, who lost his mother at a young age, converted as a young adult, and served a proselytizing mission in Spain, however, described counseling his son, as well as his daughter, on the merits of going on a mission as “insurance” against all of life’s difficulties, especially fractured families. He said regarding his daughter,

I would like nothing more than for her to go on a mission just because I think it does more for the individual than anything else. Unfortunately even in the church there is a lot of divorce now – not as much as in society in general – and so my advice to her is, ‘you need to know for yourself and the best way to know for yourself is to go on a mission.’ Your first huge crisis, to me, is not the time to start developing your relationship with God.20

Allen admitted that in part, it is for “selfish reasons” he would “love to see her go” because one never knows what “life throws at you.” Serving a mission in this church provides protection from a precarious existence; it is a sacred canopy. In the event of a catastrophic loss, as he mentioned such as that of a grandchild, he explained that a

20 Interview transcript, RMS dated June 29, 2008.
person is much more likely to “bounce back” given the “skill sets” learned on the mission. Most importantly, a mission forges one’s “relationship with God and you have a much better chance of being a survivor” in a crisis.

I’m telling you, look at it as insurance. If you want great insurance for life, go on a mission, because you know what? There’s not a guarantee but the probability sure increases if you go, serve faithfully and return. And you have insurance so you’ll go meet them on the other side [in the event of a loved ones’ death]. So that’s why I’d love her to go.21

In other words, for Allen, a convert who served, going on a mission is synonymous with being an active Mormon. And all Mormon privileges flow therefore, assuming the missionary stays faithful following service. Of ultimate concern, for active members married with families sealed in the temple, they are assured that they will be reunited “on the other side of the veil” after death. Even if his daughter does not serve, if she marries in the temple and remains active all her life, she will have the same “insurance.” But for Allen, serving a mission embeds the strength to cope with such a catastrophe and reassures eternal reunion. Having lost his mother, he knows this insurance works.

While Mormon women want an RM for a husband, for Allen, he too, was attracted to the fact that Pam was an RM. “That is what attracted me to her mother, and not just because she’s my wife because I’ve met a lot of women, but I’ve not met a woman who has been more faithful – she relies on the Lord completely.”22 He wants that insurance for his daughter; to be an RM like her mother who depends entirely on their Heavenly Father.

21 Interview transcript, RMS dated June 29, 2008.
22 Ibid.
In this family, both Allen and his wife are RMs, and although it is customary for young women to aspire to marrying an RM, which helps incentivize men into mission service, there are men who also wanted to marry a sister RM. The evidence from this small sample of participants suggests that the more deeply embedded the missionary tradition on both sides of the family, the more likely mission service will be chosen by both girls and boys. And now that the church has reduced the age eligibility for women to nineteen and men to eighteen, there is every reason to expect that mission applications will increase, both among men and women. More missionaries will likely yield more converts worldwide, and as importantly, family lineages of missionaries on both sides will become more deeply entrenched in the Mormon lineages of belief and service.

While Allen hopes for his daughter to serve, if his son decides against it within the coming year, he will be glad to have his own “insurance”:

I think he likes saying ‘maybe’ just because he knows it gets my goat. He and I are at that stage where we don’t see eye to eye on everything, and it causes a little friction in the family, but it is part of being a teenager, part of father-son relationships, too. But I think if he were to just sit there and talk to you, if he had to really give you a percentage, he’d probably say seventy percent. I would rather it be 100 percent but I think realistically, seventy is pretty good. Maybe that is just dad hoping; maybe he’ll say thirty. Don’t tell me. That will be my next crisis. But I have my insurance so I’ll get through it.

To consider one’s missionary experience in the church an “insurance policy” is a common expression. Missionaries jest about being mistaken for insurance salesmen –

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23 The church recently dropped the age of missionary service eligibility for women to 19 and men to age 18; mission applications, within the first two weeks were up by 471% with slightly over half submitted by women. Estimates are that the first year will generate 15,000 more missionaries, half of whom will be women (Stack 2012). There are currently an approximate 52,000 missionaries in the field, of which 20 percent are women.

24 Interview transcript, RMS dated June 29, 2008.
if a different kind of insurance they say. Insurance policies are actually protection against the chaos of a precarious existence. This thinking helps to demonstrate the extent to which this church with its missionary raison d’être serves as a sacred canopy of belief and belonging for Allen, his family, and others. As the covenant people, they are afforded this protection. And in gratitude and obedience, they make reciprocal covenants in family lineages of belief and service.

The fruits of all stake callings provide the methods through which Mormons get the work done, and practice discipline through individual agency in all matters, yielding temple-worthy Mormons. However, the most important duty of the RM is the priestly function of fatherhood, where starting an LDS family is the primary concern for all RMs. Once the family is raised, temple-worthy Mormons often resume auxiliary and senior missionary activities in callings domestic and abroad. “Mormon society does not suffer from the “old age” problem as much as the rest of the country does. Given that family life is considered the heart of successful church membership, there is a built-in place for grandparents and great-grandparents” who also provide service in important church duties (Leone 1979:178), such as senior missionaries. “Today, while proselytizing missions are the norm, young men and women, and older couples, may be called to serve in areas of education, health, or welfare” (Givens 2004:125). All of the participants in this study intend to serve senior missions later in life with their spouses, creating lineages of belief and service. Two couples’ examples, one converted in and immigrated from Argentina and the other from a long pioneer lineage, provide a reference group model for their fellow members. Each couple has served, along with a few others, as key participants in this study, and through snowball sampling, their
names have been mentioned numerous times by other Mormons as “good ones to talk to.”

**Two Mormon Couples’ Lives**

Two couples' lives from this group of participants provide a snapshot of the Mormon way of life. Serving a mission equips missionaries with language skills, leadership skills, and professional capabilities that are sought after by transnational corporations. For Roberto and Sofia, having converted in Argentina, Sofia served her mission in Argentina, and Roberto served in the FFLM. After serving a mission in the FFLM (1971-73), Roberto graduated from BYU Graduate School and married in the temple Sofia, also studying at BYU. Working in international banking, while raising a family of three children, they moved in 1981 to Chile where he served as his Ward Young Men’s President, Stake Clerk, and Second Counselor in the Stake Presidency; and she served as counselor in the Ward Primary Presidency, Stake Choir Director, and Institute Teacher. Moving to Ecuador 1986, he was called as First Counselor to two different Stake Presidencies; and Sofia served as Adult Sunday school teacher, and Counselor in Ward Primary Presidency. They relocated to Phoenix 1989, where Roberto was called as the Ward High Priest Group Leader; Sofia was the Primary teacher and Ward Primary Presidency Counselor. In 1993, moving to Florida he was called as a Stake High Councilor and Second Counselor to the Stake Presidency and she served as counselor in the Relief Society Presidency and Primary teaching. Returning to Chile, Roberto served as a Branch President in Chile 1996 and Sofia was the Young Woman’s President of the ward. Moving to Switzerland in 1998 he was called as the Second Counselor in a Branch Presidency and she served as counselor in the branch Primary Presidency. They have been in Florida since 2000, where he has
served as Second Counselor in the Ward Young Men’s Presidency, was called as a
Ward Young Men’s President, served on the Stake High Council, and is currently
Director of Public Affairs over multiple stakes and simultaneously serves as First
Assistant in the Ward High Priest Group and teaches Seminary. Sofia’s duties have
included teaching in Young Women’s, counselor in ward Young Women’s Presidency,
organist, and Seminary teacher. Despite a demanding international career requiring
many relocations, they have nevertheless continued their church service in each new
city.

In addition to their callings, over the past ten years, he and Sofia have continued
his family’s genealogical project begun by his father. Tracing 2,500 relatives back to
1600 Spain, they have made trips to the temple at least monthly to participate in proxy
baptisms, inviting their deceased relatives into their Mormon lineage. Roberto and
Sofia, both RMs in convert families from Argentina, have rapidly assimilated into English
units, and into Mormon and American life. In fact, Roberto’s father brought his family to
the U. S. and “the driving force was his father wanting his family to have the full breadth
experience of the church, since it was young and not as well organized in Argentina.”
While Roberto’s and Sofia’s story is unique, they would be the first to say it isn’t
exceptional.25

Victoria and Dean from Idaho pioneer lineages served concurrent missions in the
early South American Mission.26 Returning, they both attended BYU. Dean received
his BA in political science, MA in ancient scriptures, and doctoral degree in education,

25 Interview transcript, RMM, dated June 25, 2008; emails in author’s possession, dated June 16, 2008
and December 8, 2009.

26 Interview transcript, RMC & RSC, dated June 20, 2007; emails dated October 13, 2009 and October
20, 2012.
they married in the temple, and they began a family of what would become twelve children. Leaving BYU sometime in her sophomore year to support Dean’s advanced degrees and career in the Church Educational System (CES), Victoria resumed her education at a community college, and took “five years of Hebrew in midrasha classes.” A demanding church career required several major relocations, so they raised their large family moving between California, Georgia, and Florida while serving callings along the way. In 1996-99, they served as Mission President (a full-time husband-wife companion calling) in Mexico City North. Since 2004, they have alternated eighteen month senior callings with rotations visiting their children all over the world. They served with the CES in Guatemala (2004-06), in the Panama City Mission (2007-09), in the Central American Area (2010-2011) in Guatemala City, and anticipate returning to Guatemala City in June 2013, although “we could end up in Mongolia or Madagascar instead of Guatemala! We’ve known of such case.”

While living near the temple in Georgia, they did temple work monthly. In their travels they have “served as proxies for people we didn’t know, and whose names were supplied by the temple, but it has been extra special when we have had the opportunity to do the same work for someone in our own family line.” Temple work has taken them to temples in Idaho Falls, Salt Lake City, Logan, Manti, and Provo, Utah, Hawaii, Cardston (Canada), Guatemala City, Mexico City, Santo Domingo, Buenos Aires, Panama City, San Jose, Washington DC, Orlando, Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Mt. Timpanogos (Utah) and others.

27 Clarifications to Victoria’s education by email in author’s possession, dated October 1, 2012.

28 Interview transcript, RMC & RSC, dated June 20, 2007; emails dated October 13, 2009 and October 20, 2012. They were ultimately called to serve as Second Counselor and Matron in the new Tegucigalpa, Honduras Temple beginning March 2013.
Between the two of them they have done extensive genealogical work for a “combined data base of just over 10,000 names of living and deceased relatives on both sides of the family since 1500. (The Church asks member to do family history and temple work only for those born after 1500, as records prior to that are often of questionable accuracy, and much duplication would likely result.)” In researching their families, they have written over 150 biographies of relatives, appended family photos where possible, and kept detailed records of their lives for posterity. “We feel that the “turning of the hearts of the children to the fathers” means more than simply collecting names but should include getting to know our ancestors as people and learning from their experiences.”

“Turning the hearts of the children to the father” is the covenant phrase Cooper (1990) uses in his research of early “Mormon covenant social organization.” In this study of Mormon family lineages and culture, they too remember their fathers and the covenant of their fathers. Perpetuating lineages of belief and service in a long chain of memory, these members serve a mission, get an education, and marry in the temple to raise a family to serve missions. In their stakes they serve successive callings, baptize their deceased relatives in the temple, and at retirement, go on senior missions. With a new temple to be opened in the Fort Lauderdale Stake in 2014, these active members will have accessible to them, right around the corner, a temple in which to invite more deceased relatives into the baptismal covenant. Dean explained,

When we were in Athens, Georgia, we went to the Atlanta Temple each month. Once the Fort Lauderdale Temple is constructed, we will probably attend at least

29 Interview transcript, RMC & RSC, dated June 20, 2007.

30 Ibid.
that often, and we look forward to the likelihood that we may be invited to serve as volunteer officiators in that temple—perhaps once or twice a week. But while here in Florida thus far, we have attended the Orlando Temple less frequently.  

Every missionary in this study is living an active, perhaps even an exemplary, life. Bringing Christians together in the exemplary community was Paul’s eschatological concern (Bosch 2005). Building exemplary family lineages and communities is the goal of the Mormon three-fold mission – make missionaries out of sons and daughters and perfect the saints in their stakes in Zion. Striving for perfection these RMs are busy doing only that – raising families and serving callings in their local wards where they find shepherding in their bishops and stake presidents. Next the stake leadership is considered in the FFLM, where four of five stake presidents are also returned missionaries.

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31 Email dated October 13, 2009 in the possession of the author.
CHAPTER 13
PERFECTING SAINTS IN ZION: STAKE LEADERSHIP

The stakes in Zion are where membership is recruited, fellowshipped, activated, retained, and called to serve all the needs of the congregations in service of one another in a vast laity organization. New stakes established serve as the benchmark of church expansion around the world. As one of the oldest plausibility structures in the church, stake presidents, assisted by ward bishops and branch presidents and their high councils, protect the doctrinal boundaries of the church and serve as the local priesthood connection to ‘the Brethren’ in Salt Lake City. Comprised of around 3,000 members, the organizational requirements and layers of duties necessitate strong priesthood leadership, positions that draw heavily from returned missionaries. The RMs in this study, together with some converts of leadership capability, serve as the next generation of local leaders. In leadership positions, they serve ‘callings’ – a special task to enact the will of God in the local congregations. Through stake callings they help to perfect the saints, which is to say perfect themselves and each other through laity work, discipline, and accountability.

The highest of callings in the stake is the stake president with his two counselors, advised by a high council of twelve men. Each stake’s group of fifteen men is responsible for all the units – wards and branches – within their geographic stake boundaries. Where leadership is deep in well-established stakes such as the four in the FFLM, generally, the older or more experienced men serve as mentors and a reference group for the younger men. But, callings are not necessarily upwardly linear in leadership and there is no aspiring to callings or lobbying for a position. A stake president may well be called to teach Primary as a subsequent calling. While it helps to
have leadership skills and experience, they are not necessarily required for subsequent callings.\(^1\) When an active member humbly serves in whatever capacity is needed, she also serves as an example of leadership. For example, one RM having served as a branch president in Paraguay in the latter 1970s has since then, among other callings, been a mission president counselor to three FFLM mission presidents and is now serving as a ward mission leader.

It is the case however, that church leadership from the First Presidency down to the local wards and branches follows a hierarchy. While a stake president might serve in Primary in a subsequent calling, assuming he has “magnified his callings” in all positions and assuming he has the strength of leadership necessary to higher positions, it is safe to say he won’t stay in the ward Primary position. Nevertheless, the overall cumulative effect of self- and institutional discipline and accountability, plus the leadership skills and experience, together with team work and collaboration accrue toward the goal of perfecting the saints in their stakes, and in their families.

Because a few stake leadership positions fell outside of this small sample of RMs (from the Americas), it was necessary to interview more widely. To include all current stake presidents, the snowball sample was expanded. The Homestead Stake President, an RM who served in Spain (1993-95), and the Pompano Beach Stake President who converted as an adult over thirty years prior are included in this work. Additionally, the Director of the Bishop’s Storehouse is a Panamanian adult convert. The two women in the Fort Lauderdale Stake Relief Society Presidency include an RM from Taiwan (1977-78) and an adult convert. One ward bishop served in Portugal.

\(^1\) Interview transcripts, RSM & RMM, dated June 25, 2008.
One mission president converted as an adult. These seven additional participants have attended higher education, and the men are professional or semi-professional. All of their marriages are sealed for time and eternity and without exception all families expect their sons to serve missions, encouraging their daughters to prioritize marriage, or go on missions if they so choose. Having perpetuated their lineages of family service or begun new missionary families among converts, these participants simultaneously lead their stakes, wards and branches while juggling careers and family, which will be returned to later in the chapter.

In this chapter, the four current stake presidents’ interviews show their most important concerns and responsibilities as they shepherd their members. The narratives that follow help to demonstrate how local leadership meets the challenges of a vibrant and growing multi-ethnic mission. Under the stake president’s oversight, there are extensive and time-consuming church programs, auxiliaries, and service. Stake presidents, along with their bishops, act as ‘judges in Israel’ and as such protect the covenant boundaries of the faithful. One Miami bishop recalled the gravity of being a ‘judge in Israel’ at the opening of his interview. “When they [stake presidency] called me as a bishop, they made it a significant point to say, “as bishop, you are a judge in Israel.” Of particular interest in this research, are the topics of discipline, work, service or activity, self-reliance, and education as methods of striving for perfection. Interviews include the Bishop’s Storehouse Director, the Relief Society President and First Counselor, and two Ward Bishops. In this vibrant and expansive mission cultural tensions are embedded as a result of multiple languages, the predominance of English

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2 Interview transcript, RMO dated June 23, 2008.
throughout the church programs, and the challenges of language and unit leadership. The local leadership helps to keep members living their covenants where they are raising families, and supporting the next generations of missionaries in their children and grandchildren. Their spiritual maturation and temporal success – their striving to perfect the saints – yields the greatest collective reward in Mormonism: a temple.

**Stake Presidencies**

In this study, four current stake presidents and one past were interviewed; the four current presidents’ narratives are included here. The longest serving stake president, the only adult convert among them, oversees the Pompano Beach Stake. A past stake president of the Fort Lauderdale Stake, an RM from Bolivia, participated in 2007, and was subsequently released to move retuning to Utah; thereafter the new stake president (an RM from Canada) participated, and along with their wives and families included me in Monday night Family Home Evenings. Both of these men came from missionary families of deep lineages, growing up in the American west as did the Homestead Stake President. The Homestead Stake President, an RM from Spain interviewed in April 2008, became the new president of the reorganized Miami South Stake in September 2008. The fifth stake president of Miami Lakes, a convert as a child in Honduras who served a mission in California, oversees what for members is still considered the remaining Spanish stake although it is no longer language-designated.³

³ The president of the former Miami Spanish Stake was not available for an interview. After several attempts to schedule, an interview was postponed until my return for the October 2008 conference, which I intended to attend at his stake center. Arriving to an empty parking lot, a key participant shared that the building was no longer the stake center pursuant to the stake’s dissolution and his release a month earlier. Prior to the 2008 reorganization, there were five stakes led by three Anglo Americans and two Hispanic men overseeing the two Spanish stakes. As of fieldwork February 2008, the Stake Blue Sheet for Fort Lauderdale indicated among the stake presidency and high council of 15 leading men, six were Hispanic. At that time there were eleven wards and branches in the Fort Lauderdale Stake, including a
The qualities of a stake president were set forth by President Spencer W. Kimball, summarized as follows: “A stake president needs to know the gospel, live its precepts, and be guided by the Lord to be a light for all to follow” and “foster unity, Christian brotherhood, peace, and tranquility among members under his jurisdiction and thus cause Zion to increase in beauty for all to see.” Recognizing the eternal role of fathers, he must work to help develop them, “enhancing the spiritual welfare and individual conversion of members of their respective families” as his primary concern. As steward, he will “administer the Lord’s will in the “basic vision, goals, and objectives of the gospel as the Lord defines them” and “administer programs that have spiritual substance in every aspect of their activities.” He will seek wise counsel from his counselors and high council, collaborating with them in his decisions and judgment. “The stake president knows that practically all Church activities” are his jurisdiction, “including the work of the wards through the bishoprics” with which he will “work to provide adequate leadership for those activities” (Brown 1978:105-106). In a nutshell, the stake president is to universalize the particular covenant. In other words, he must protect the doctrinal boundaries of the covenant at the same time he invites all people to join, or to come unto Christ. He protects the structure and mobilizes the saints to make and keep covenants. In the narratives that follow, each stake president was asked their primary responsibility, and each provided a unique and unifying theme for their stake administration; a sort of personal imprimatur.

Young Singles ward, a deaf branch, a Haitian branch, two Spanish wards, and six English wards. The Haitian branch had Haitian leadership in the branch presidency; the two Spanish wards were led by Hispanic ward bishoprics. One ward was led by an African American bishop; the balance of these units had Anglo American leadership. Following the reorganization, there are four stakes with three Anglo Americans and one Hispanic president serving this multi-cultural mission. There are no longer any Haitian branches or deaf branches designated; two Spanish wards remain in the Fort Lauderdale Stake. Stake Blue Sheets were unavailable for the other stakes.
Fort Lauderdale Stake President

The newest stake president called to Fort Lauderdale four months earlier mused on the internationalization of the church in the experience of his own life. He grew up in California, served a mission in Canada in what seemed like a relatively homogenous area, lived in Houston, and is now a president in a U. S. stake that seems something like a “foreign country.” He shared his idealism, his feelings of overwhelming responsibility, and the difficulties of finding balance. For him, the primary responsibility of his stake presidency is

inviting all to come unto Christ. Proclaiming the gospel, redeeming the dead, perfecting the Saints – those are all ways in which we accomplish the goal of inviting all to come unto Christ. I love these people who are from different countries. Brother Gonzalez [of the Seventy], upon my call, embraced me in a Latin embrace, with tears in his eyes, and with pure love. The Latins are generally very loving people, and very kind.

He was struck by the contrasts in the area, where on the one hand, Haitian immigrants fled an oppressive political regime, “first generation, flat-out, dirt poor; and I’m a whatever sixth generation American” living in Weston along with many professional Mormons, where he estimated the median annual salary at $96,000. “They’ve [his professional Mormon colleagues] been to universities, with graduate degrees; they are financially stable, and strong. Then fifteen to twenty miles away, here I am attending church with someone . . . it is very humbling.” Mormon men display a masculine emotional response when they are moved by a religious experience – they often get teary-eyed when they discussed their roles as leaders and fathers or bear their testimonies.

4 This section on the Fort Lauderdale president is compiled from interview transcripts dated February 15, 2008 and June 24, 2008.
Of all the stake presidents, his interview was laced with the religious experience of personal revelation, which is consistent with the qualities a stake president is to possess. The emotive features of his religious experiences suggested that they powerfully influenced his interior life even as they were employed on prayerful behalf of his members and his family. Asking for guidance to direct his stake, receiving the confirmation of the Holy Ghost, and taking administrative action demonstrates how rational revelation functions. He recalled a pensive and overwhelming moment when during a recent Sunday Sacrament Service, he was seated on the stand overlooking his congregation and feeling the gravitas of his stake and family responsibilities. “And then, just very gentle, kind comforting words were: It’s all right. It is my ward, my stake, and I’ll take care of them. I really will. All I need you to do is give your very best. And, I thought, well, I can do that much. He will touch the lives of people and he’ll work the miracles.” He remembered being counseled by his stake president years prior when he was called to run his ward: “Bishop, just remember that there will come a day when you will be released as a bishop, but you will never be released as a father. Always remember that.”

Also consistent with the concerns of the stake president, he discussed the two stake goals for the year, which are to “strengthen the members’ faith in Christ; and strengthen the family. So, for us, the church is not the family, but it is there to support the family. Parents cannot abdicate teaching of the gospel.” His primary concern is that of finding balance between church and family, a recurrent theme among these participants.
We’re just trying to hold back on the numbers of activities, and asking families to
do good things together. Teaching parents, our job is to teach and to train. For all
do us in leadership responsibilities, you just have to know that you have to
carve out time for your family. It is great when the women understand that, too.
My wife reminds me frequently that I need to spend time at home, time with the
kids; they need you as their dad. That is a challenge, to keep it all in balance.
And sometimes it gets all overwhelming.”

Perfection is a juggling act. Holding an executive position in a transnational
corporation and commuting from Weston to Miami every day, he and his wife with four
children sometimes rendezvous for dinner at a fast food restaurant so they can have
dinner on those work nights he has stake responsibilities. One recent evening he went
straight from work to the mission home for meetings. “I had a really poor day at work,
frustrating. I showed up at 7:00 and the mission president could tell. He asked if I was
ok? And I said, “Well, not really. But I’ll be fine in a few minutes. And at ten when I’m
done, I’ll be fantastic. And I was.” Meeting with members “our purpose was to build the
Spirit together,” conducting member counseling and temple interviews. He explained, in
preparation of going to the temple the first time, the interview questions and the power
of the Holy Ghost in his own life, worth quoting in full for his passion:

I sit with them and ask, “Do you have a testimony of God the Father, and his son,
Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost? Do you have a testimony of Jesus Christ; do
you have a testimony of the restoration of the gospel? Do you sustain the
President of the church? Are you a full tithe payer? Do you uphold the Word of
Wisdom? Do you strive to do what you need to do to be right with your families?
You go through all of these things, and these people say, “Yes, yes, yes.” Then,
“tell me about your conversion story.” I hear about their conversions and the
Spirit just comes. I AM ON FIRE BY TEN O’CLOCK AT NIGHT! At seven I was
... but by ten, I want to tell EVERYBODY about these wonderful experiences of
people. That is the benefit. I love this work. I do this work here at my job, and at
times there are portions of it that I love, and other times that I don’t. But man, the
work in the church I love it. I love it. Going to visit people in their homes. I love
that.”
A major challenge is that the work in the church is all voluntary at the local level. All of his counselors, high council, and staff positions are filled by men most of whom are professional as well. “One of the purposes of the organization structure is to keep the congregations small – about 300 to 400 members” in a ward. Wards are divided when they get too large to manage, and when there are more members than assignments. On the other hand, there needs to be enough membership to fill the callings so that individuals are not responsible for three or four callings each.

The number of personnel required to run the stake and its units is demanding. According to the ‘Stake Blue Sheet’ each stake has an approximate seventy positions to be filled; each ward has another fifty positions, and the smaller branches have half that number. In the Fort Lauderdale Stake that computes to an approximate 525 lay callings across eleven units. Serving in these positions well beyond Sundays, they volunteer time nearly every week, and are accountable for their tasks. Even in a stake as mature as Fort Lauderdale, some members serve concurrent callings; for instance, the regional Public Affairs Director also serves as a Seminary teacher and First Assistant to the Ward High Priest Group. There is constant turnover or “domino effect” in these hundreds of positions (Taber 1993:352); a member is called, sustained (voted for by a show of hands aye or nay) by the unit membership, released and replaced once served, and called to another position. Constant changes in callings provide an internal revitalization mechanism, keeping members growing in skills and collaboration in the community of faith. “Serving a variety of callings gives members a breadth of experience” and “fosters a high degree of cooperation” between the various organizations (Taber 1993:355). And most importantly, serving callings keeps their faith
front and center in their everyday lives. The most demanding of these positions are the stake presidencies and ward bishoprics (durations three to five years) where they may spend an approximate fifteen to twenty hours per week after their professions, in most cases supported by wives and children at home who share their dedication to their callings. With mutual support from family and church community, each member is to ‘magnify their callings’ but also find a balance.

The most difficult part for this president is when “people aren’t trying, aren’t motivated.” He recalls President Benson’s axiom: “I remind people there is a great quote from President Benson. The world works from the outside in, and Christ works from the inside out.” He also paraphrased a more recent apostle’s words,

‘A study of the doctrines of Christ will change behavior faster than the study of behavior will change behavior.’ So, if you want to see a change in your life or in your behavior, focus on the doctrines of Christ and you will change much faster than if you tried to study anger management. So, I think about motivating people from the inside out.

Unlike other churches, this church has ongoing revelation, which if following the ‘still, small voice’ helps to discipline its members. And then, they are accountable at several levels, within their families, to their ward bishops, and stake presidents through worthiness interviews to maintain their temple recommends. The downside of perfectionism is the psychological toll where members internalize perfection as “rigidly striving for goals and basing self-worth on productivity and accomplishment” (Williams 1999:47). The challenge is in the balance; balancing the demands of callings with the demands of family life, and balancing the demands expanding the covenant people and getting them to participate, while maintaining the doctrinal integrity of the covenant. For this stake president, his major concern was to “love the people,” an attitude for bringing
more converts into the church, and expanding the covenant. Working with members, helping them to keep their covenants, he said "I love that."\(^5\)

**Miami Lakes Stake President**

Another stake president, called in 2003 to the Miami Lakes Stake,\(^6\) the only Hispanic stake president was born Jewish in Honduras. His parents converted with he was three, and he was baptized at age nine. The family immigrated to the U. S. after which he served a mission in California (1988-1990). More than any other leader interviewed, this president’s emphasis on language accommodation and education was emphatic. He explained,

> We teach the gospel of Jesus Christ and we need to deliver that message in any language that our communities need, Creole, Spanish, English, or if Chinese is needed, so be it. We will teach in any language, the first and most important thing I realized [as stake president]. I account for [our high growth] because we speak all the different languages; we’ve requested missionaries who speak Creole, Spanish.

Having grown up in a home where his Dutch mother spoke six languages and his Bulgarian father eight, he is fluent in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Therefore, “it was easy for me to cater to people, no problems.” One mission president, assigned to work with the Miami Lakes Stake President, expressed how the president manages the language needs in his stake:

> He is very successful with how he conducts church business in his stake – doing both English and Spanish. He repeats everything he said in English in Spanish. If there is somebody here who cannot understand English? If no, ok, then we go

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\(^5\) This section on the Fort Lauderdale Stake President is compiled from interview transcripts dated February 15, 2008 and June 24, 2008.

\(^6\) This section on the Miami Lakes Stake President is from the interview transcript, June 29, 2008 with stake president.
in English. If there is one person who cannot understand English, he does both. Almost all the stake leaders in that stake are bilingual.

Teaching the gospel in any language resonates with an axiom from Doctrines and Covenants 93: “the glory of God is intelligence,” the motto of BYU. For him, educating is perfecting the saints. For me, it is very essential. I know intellectually, [I am] spiritually satisfied, [and] I am fulfilled also. The brain wants to know things, so in my case, I love the knowledge the church presents to us. Perfecting the saints has to do with knowing what you believe in. We believe that the glory of God is intelligence and knowledge.

The church has long prioritized education. In addition to the Church Educational System, its university system, and a few remaining academies, the Perpetual Education Fund was started by President Gordon B. Hinckley in 2001 to create low-interest loans for returned missionaries with which to obtain higher education. With the goal of helping “youth in developing areas rise out of the poverty they and generations before them have known,” education also accrues toward perfection as eternal progress. To qualify, an RM must have been called from an eligible country, needs to be enrolled in collegiate Institute, and may use the loans to obtain technical, vocational, or professional degrees. Since its inception, over 50,000 students in fifty countries have participated, earning three to four times more income following graduation, with fifty-three percent of the participants women. Becoming eligible for such loans, and using them successfully to gain upward mobility, may ultimately help to expand the numbers of missionary applicants in developing countries.

Education and language accommodation may help to expand the covenant to include more people. This stake president sees teaching as a remedy to a fundamental failure, evident in the Roman Catholic and Jewish communities with which he is familiar.

Where Catholics have little read the Bible, going only to Mass, “they didn’t understand what they were being taught in Latin.” Obviously, “there is a problem with knowledge, a failure to teach the gospel.” The same is true for the Jews:

So when you go to a synagogue, you hear a recitation of the Five Books of Moses and the faith that they’re using – if you’re going to a church you can’t understand what they’re saying, you’ve got to have a faith beyond my comprehension. You don’t understand the religion, but you do it because my father was a Jew, my grandfather was a Jew. I thank my father for looking into other things.

He went on to explain the Book of Mormon teaching that caught his father’s attention, which begins with a “Jewish family leaving Jerusalem in the time of Jeremiah.” This first missionary teaching, connecting the Jews to the Americas, still resonates in his memory.

In addition to high rates of growth in his stake, he is “more proud” of activation. “We call it retention; a high percentage – seventy-eight percent – retention rate, despite high mobility and migration rates.” By tracking individuals, through the bishops, retention “is measured. We know how many times they come to church and they are tracked for twenty-four months – new members – how are they progressing. Do they have a responsibility in the church; are they preparing to go to the temple in a year to be sealed as a family?” He gave a hypothetical scenario in a ward with ten new baptisms: “I specifically ask, ‘how are those individuals doing – their families, their youth active in youth programs, such as BSA’. That’s how we keep high retention.” Although this is to be the standard in the church, consistent with the attributes of a stake president, he admits “Some [presidents] are better at it than others.” So, new and reactivated members and their families must be monitored for progress, which this president says is appreciated. “We track them, we watch over them, have a good home teacher.
assigned to them, for any needs they have, we are there for them. People like to feel needed, wanted.”

To belong to this church is “a way of life – the gospel, the church is a way of life, because we leave things behind, replacing them with new things.” In a Jewish home the prior evening, the president was introduced “as a Mormon and they are not allowed to drink, to do this or that.” I said,

We’re allowed but we chose not to. Not to drink alcohol, to smoke, to do other things; so people have to change their ways. Maybe we don’t understand the reasons for [the prohibitions], maybe a glass of wine won’t do anything to us, but because the Lord asked us to restrain ourselves from that, if we are obedient to the Word of Wisdom, those are the changes people have to make. These standards are difficult. One of the reasons I am a member of this church is that it requires very high standards. People who are looking for high standards, maybe they can’t always live it, but they believe that Jesus Christ has a high standard and they seem to be wanting that from a church.

The appeal of a strict church with high standards resonates for him, but for many people, these standards may turn out to be impediments.

Of all the presidents, he is most concerned with ecumenical outreach, and he frequently mentions the Jews. Although Jews would have to embrace the Messiah, he said “I think they are more afraid of their families – almost a traitor – if you change your religion. All my Jewish friends – I tell them ‘I’m a better Jew, and that’s all right.’ They say, ‘No you’re a confused Jew.’” However, recently meeting with 800 Jews in Salt Lake City during the General Conference, “told me a big story. I think the membership of Jews is growing.” One of his goals

is to be more proactive with leaders of other religions. I believe that religions are too separated. We have the same purpose, so be it we have different ways of looking at things; we should be more united in helping families. Meaning, if they have a planned event for families, we’d like to join you in the event. With our
honesty and integrity, we should be able to share that activity without feeling mistrust, or suspicion. I’m working on that; [but] I don’t know.

This president’s concern with language, education, and ecumenical outreach are all attitudes that help expand the people of God. He is concerned with language accommodation and teaching as appeals for potential converts, and as methods for helping to retain the members. His stake’s high rates of growth and retention he attributes to their emphasis on teaching the gospel in “every tongue.” If people can understand comprehensively the contents of the covenant teachings, they are more likely to join, be retained, and work toward perfection. At this writing it is not possible to know how the recent contraction in language-designated units juxtaposes with his concerns for language accommodation. He sees the maintenance of covenant boundaries such as the Word of Wisdom as less an enforcement issue than incumbent upon the people to want to obey by conformity or emulation. “What we try to do is live the gospel in our communities, allow people to see a good example and high standards, they will come by themselves. Although we are a gospel sharing church, we also have activities where we just model good examples.”

**Pompano Beach Stake President**

Taking a more administrative approach to stake leadership, the Pompano Beach Stake President has served the longest tenure in the FFLM. An adult convert, he explained “My primary responsibility is to teach the principles of the gospel. We keep things pretty basic focusing on the principles—keeping the commandments, paying tithing, keeping the Word of Wisdom—the core of Mormonism—no need to go off into

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8 This section on the Miami Lakes Stake President is from the interview transcript, June 29, 2008 with stake president.
the edges of the doctrines.” Teaching the correct principles, he presides over all the units, the finances, conferences, meetings and all coordination. As the regional welfare chairman, one of the most important gospel principles is self-reliance for individuals and the community. He instructed, “You’ll find that throughout the church welfare – [it is] to build people up, not to give them a handout and put them on the dole.”

All temporal well-being is administered through the General Authority office of the Presiding Bishopric in Salt Lake City. While temporal well-being has been a concern of the church since its founding, the Welfare Program as an institution in the church was launched during the Great Depression (Mangum and Blumell 1993). Likewise, the ward bishops are the head of their members’ temporal welfare and they answer to their stake presidencies. The regional welfare chairman (an additional appointment for a stake president) oversees all temporal welfare concerns for the multi-stake mission. In accordance with the Instructions Resources for Welfare Trainers (2011), after defining that all things are spiritual to the Lord including all things temporal (physical needs), the instructions state, “Spiritual and temporal well-being result from doing the will of the Lord as revealed through His prophets.” Although this instruction does not promise prosperity through the gospel, it does say that joining this church results in spiritual and temporal progress, and Mormons attempt to live that example. This teaching is dependent upon the proper use of individual agency in discipline and obedience, which is necessary to self-reliance. Having taken care of oneself and family, then a person is capable of caring for others; “self-reliance is essential to caring for others” (Instructional Resources for Welfare Trainers 2011:3).

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9 This section on the Pompano Beach Stake President is from the Interview transcript dated April 8, 2008.
As part of his welfare duties, this president is well known for his community wide work in natural disaster response. Perfecting the saints also means teaching members to take responsibility for personal and family preparedness first. Mormons are counseled by their leaders to have on hand at all times at least three months’ worth of food, water, and necessities. And second, how to respond to a hurricane within the larger community. He explained how the stake coordinates with church headquarters and the Red Cross, with which the institutional church has had a twenty-five year partnership. In 2004, during Charlie on the west coast they organized ward parties to go over and help. He explained,

The next several years with the season approaching, we insured that everyone was organized prior to the season, communication lines were clear, and it is a lot of work. As a storm organizes and approaches, the area welfare representative and church headquarters get on a conference call with the regional welfare chairmen of the adjoining areas, which include Orlando, Tampa, Ft. Myers, and we begin to plan a response. Sometimes there are thirty to forty people on a conference call.

Following the conference call, “then missionaries are assigned [by the mission president] to Red Cross shelters and that is actually part of their public service – [they perform] certain hours of service every month.” The stakes’ organizations operate as networks of thousands of members calling and checking up on one another, helping each other with any problems, and with a rapid relief response once the disaster has passed. This effort flows through the membership and through various agencies, such as the well-known volunteers in yellow tee-shirts Mormon Helping Hands, who come in from all over the U. S. as troops on the ground. According to the Miami Lakes Stake President, 7,000 Mormon members volunteered through Mormon Helping Hands during
Hurricane Andrew in 1992.\textsuperscript{10} Large sums of money and in-kind donations are donated by members to LDS Charities, LDS Humanitarian Services, and LDS Philanthropies.

In addition to disaster relief, this president discussed other humanitarian initiatives his church takes, such as water and wheelchairs. For example,

If a community needs water, then the church will do the well, if the community will make the commitment to take care of it and do some of the work. It is always a cooperative between the church and the local community, which must take responsibility for the project. [It is] not given away. They must work for what they get; they'll take ownership and take care of it.

Beyond emergency relief, water and wheelchairs, LDS Charities partners with people all over the world in food (nutrition and agriculture); vision care; neonatal resuscitation training; and immunizations.\textsuperscript{11} The volunteers for these programs are largely from the ranks of the retired, or what Mormons call “senior missionaries.”

Teaching self-reliance in all things temporal and spiritual, which are for Mormons ‘gospel principles,’ profoundly resonates with this president, who said that the benefits of conversion are those he experienced himself. “You can find tangible answers to life’s big questions: ‘where do we come from, what is God like?’” For him, the Book of Mormon is the perfect companion to the Bible because the Mormon scripture clears up many biblical questions, the answers to which are elsewhere unavailable. He explained, “I had contemplated joining the Roman Catholic Church as a youth, but the priest just did not have answers to some of those questions.”

Throughout the Americas where people are from a Roman Catholic background, he thinks people have the same big questions, “and the teachings are kept by the priest.

\textsuperscript{10} Interview transcript RMB, dated June 29, 2008.

Everything is a mystery. But they can find the answers themselves through the LDS faith.” The role of the missionary becomes the gateway to that knowledge, through the Holy Ghost. “Nineteen year old boys teach and have those answers,” if a person is willing to listen. And yet, for Mormons, even as certain of their truth, admit they do not expect they have the entire knowledge of God, which is to say that through the role of ongoing revelation more knowledge is yet to come.

I think that is the primary benefit – being able to understand the role of Jesus Christ, his life and mission, what he accomplished. And being able to explain that and know what it means, and how it works. Understanding it is still very complex, and we don’t understand all of it. But the purpose and the power and how it applies to daily life is to me the great benefit. And having the assurance that these things are true and to be able to understand that by the power of the Holy Ghost. Myself. I don’t have to rely on someone’s opinion or someone reading scriptures to me. I can study it by myself, pray about it, and have the truth revealed to me.

Teaching correct principles of self-reliance in temporal and spiritual matters, taking care of the needy, and responding in emergency situations – these are long-held Mormon concerns upon which the welfare system is based. Perfecting the saints most importantly means teaching the power of personal agency. Using personal agency, correctly disciplined and obedient to the teachings of the church, a potential member is empowered to become self-reliant and upwardly mobile through the resources of the church.12

Homestead Stake President Reassigned to the Miami South Stake

The fourth and final narrative included among the stake presidents comes from what was the Homestead Stake, now known as the Miami South Stake.13 An RM from

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12 This section on the Pompano Beach Stake President is from the Interview transcript dated April 8, 2008

13 This fourth section on stake presidents is taken from the interview transcript dated April 14, 2008.
Spain (1993-95), and born into an LDS family, he views his main responsibility as overseeing

that the correct doctrine is taught, that the church is organized and run according to the teachings of the revelations that come down to us. A lot of the more difficult issues in the units are referred up to the Stake Presidency for counseling. Welfare or transgressions, the stake president oversees all of these. We do a lot of training and speaking as well.

Quickly, the wellbeing of the family emerges as his greatest concern. It is his role to be sure correct doctrines are taught in his stake so that every family member is clear on the orthodox teachings of the church in all matters.

When discussing the distribution of missionary men and women, he feels the ratio is about right, as taught by the church. Although he expects his son will go on a mission, he has no expectation of his daughter's service: “The teachings of the church, which I subscribe to are, if she has the chance for getting married then we’ll encourage her to do so. But if she has no prospects and she has a desire to serve, she is welcome to and it will be a blessing for her.” Regarding the distribution of men and women in the mission field, he said generally speaking the more missionaries the more conversions, which would mean more family missionary lineages. “Hopefully, my kids will go on a mission and they’ll have kids and a wonderful family to go on a mission and the church grows in that way.” He stresses here the LDS commitment to families:

But it is also not only about church growth – it is about wholesome families – when missionaries go out into the field, it isn’t just about growth. Enlarging the size of the church is definitely a by-product, but that’s not necessarily the point. The point is to bring the gospel into people’s families so that they can be happy and be blessed.
Family emphasis is why Mormon missionaries are taught to proselytize primarily among families. “As we do missionary work we focus on – we teach to everyone, don’t misunderstand – but we very much prefer to teach families as a whole, so that the family as a whole can come into the gospel and strengthen each other.”

As concerned with families, his other major responsibility is as the regional overseer of the Bishop’s Storehouse located in Ft. Lauderdale, working with the other stake presidents to make sure there is access to church welfare for any members in need throughout the FFLM. Several participants in this study indicate that non-members can get help at the Bishop’s Storehouse. A bishop in his stake cited a General Authority on the matter.

It [welfare] also extends to non-members – and I remember when the discussion came out in 1991 and a General Authority got up and explained: ‘bishop, you are bishop of all the people in your ward, not just the members.’ A lot of bishops got really nervous, but there have been people come in who needed help who were not LDS, but we don’t advertise these things. This president said “generally speaking it is only for members” because the church provides other programs for needy non-members. To apply for welfare assistance, the person must first have exhausted family and extended-family resources and government aid.

Then, we help on the principle that we’re not trying to create dependency on the church – a basic church tenant is that every person needs to be self-reliant – and so we teach those principles, in educational seminar, and [through] job employment people, to get them out there and improve their employment, education or skills, so that they can better provide for themselves. And so the use of the Bishop’s Storehouse is more of a short-term emergency help to get back on your own feet and to save yourself.
For this president, perfecting the saints includes welfare, but the welfare and humanitarian projects of the church are not for the purpose of its growth, and are separate entities altogether from missionary work.

The welfare piece is a very important piece of that work [perfecting the saints], although it is not widely known in the general public – the welfare and the humanitarian work of the Church. We tend to be very service-oriented but we tend to be very quiet about it. In other words, the scriptures teach that if you give service and you do it for worldly recognition – then you’ve had your blessing already. But, if you do your work in secret – the members do an awful lot that the world will never see – we like it that way. So, for people to see how much the members really do? In that respect I don’t think it helps the church to grow.

But, he continued, having an association with active members cannot hurt their cause. In this way, members act as a reference group.

Having said that, on a personal level, those people who are close with members, I think through observation they can see that members of the church are good people, they make good friends, they help out, and they leave a good image for the church which helps it grow.

For the poor and needy, Mormons fast one twenty-four hour period per month and donate the savings to the bishop on Fast and Testimony Sunday. The greater purpose of welfare is to give families a “hand up” not a “hand-out.” And because it is inspired work, it helps in the overall perfection of the saints – strengthening everyone involved. By invoking revelation, along with well-directed resources, the solutions to economic needs are more likely to be sustainable.

When you have a bishop who we believe has access to revelation from Heavenly Father on how to help people, and he sits down one by one with the family or individual that needs help, and he looks at the analysis of needs and resources, working with a family over a long period of time, then you feel like the money donated has gone to a good use, where it really was needed and is not just becoming a Band-Aid but helping someone move on to become self-sustaining and really have a good life for themselves. I really like that as opposed to, ‘here is a sandwich. Goodbye.’
The gospel principle of self-reliance is recurrent to the point of demonstrating a near-aversion among these members to what Americans know as welfare, which Mormons believe is pernicious and perpetuates the problems of the poor by encouraging laziness, and robbing them of initiative. “This is more a long-term solution to solve those issues. The poor will not go away, but you can help them turn around.”\(^14\)

For the Pompano Beach and Homestead Stake Presidents, managing the welfare needs of the region is a significant concern. They are both keenly opposed to creating any dependencies in a church where a gospel principle is self-reliance. For LDS, to create an economic dependency for an individual or family would be the antithesis of perfection or progress. The Homestead Stake President arranged a fieldtrip to the Bishop’s Storehouse.

**The Bishop’s Storehouse**

Arriving at the region’s Bishop’s Storehouse, the first thing its director, Brother Jaime,\(^15\) said was, “Let me read: “Storehouses exist as one of the many resources for bishops’ to use in meeting the needs of the poor and needy. In addition to providing food for the poor, they can also provide work and training opportunities for recipients while teaching self-reliance.”” He went on that the “long term objective is to build character” in Storehouses where there are “opportunities to serve – we always feel the help of the Holy Ghost helping us when we don’t know what to do.” He explained the nature of storehouse callings as missionary by example. “Our callings are missionary in that we keep hours; volunteers do so when they want to. We don’t do proselyting, we

\(^{14}\) This fourth section on stake presidents is taken from the interview transcript dated April 14, 2008.

\(^{15}\) The section on the Bishop’s Storehouse is taken from the interview transcript dated June 27, 2008.
serve by example. This is a blessing because I believe in the church principles.”

Although the purpose of welfare is to help the needy, Brother Jaime makes clear he, too, benefits. “But on a daily basis, I experience more and more faith everyday due to this service.”

From Panama, he and his family converted to the church fourteen years prior. His family story is a common narrative, although the level of his candor was unique, which is included uninterrupted:

When I was a Catholic I smoked and drank. I had a big problem with our children. Our daughter. We came here and we were in a big clash of cultures – and we were fighting like crazy. I saw a “Family First” video from the church and I thought that is exactly what I wanted. Some missionaries came with the Book of Mormon. I told them, “I love your video but I don’t like your long name.” Catholic. One word. But they came over anyway. And two sisters came over and explained everything. Everything is beautiful. My daughter said, “I’m interested.” If this is a solution for them, then, we'll listen to the six lessons. My wife didn’t really want to. But the second lesson then the third, my wife joined. And in five-six months we converted. And then my mother saw the difference in her son – no smoking, no drinking, she couldn’t believe it. At that time my older sister was interested in my change. Then, my sister went to convert – then she visited my mother – and guess what? She finds the missionaries who were giving the lessons – and my mom says that the same church that her son and daughter joined, she joined with open arms.

Serving his calling to the storehouse, he too, like his stake president, is concerned for families. After all, it was his family crisis and the “Family First” video that brought him to the church. In three days this last week of June 2008, they served ten families through an organized and methodical process. Before a family can receive help, they must have looked for work first, gone to their families, and the government. Once they have done that,

the family gets with the Relief Society President to produce a menu of what your normal foods are. This translates with our forms. The Relief Society President signs, the Bishop signs and seals, then it comes to us. The menu is for up to
fifteen days. And we try to get close to what they need for fifteen days; but could be an exception for longer.

Although an entirely standardized program, as all LDS Church programs are, it is still flexible and responsive. He went on, “Whatever the bishop says we do it. This is the Bishop’s Storehouse. If the family lives a long way away, like Homestead and the bishop says three months, then we do three months [of goods]. Every family is different. We don’t charge a nickel for this.”

But in return, the recipients work for their supplies. “We all work together. We just do a little piece of the Lord’s work, and remind them to please thank the Lord. We only work with one person/family at a time; must wait in line for me. Meanwhile, here is a list of things you can help do while you’re waiting for me.” Because there are no hand-outs, prospective welfare recipients work restocking the floor-to-ceiling shelves in the backroom with boxes of dry goods and toiletries, reloading the walk-in refrigerators with produce, milk and meats, sweeping the concrete floors and tidying displays, or cleaning bathrooms. Brother Jamie admitted cleaning the bathroom might feel beneath a recipient “but no one should feel that way; it is all work that has to be done. And this is a working church.” Work and self-reliance are the keys to perfecting saints through welfare. Welfare needs are one of the main concerns of the Relief Society.16

The Relief Society Presidency

The Relief Society President is considered the women’s presidency almost lateral to the stake president. First organized under Joseph Smith in 1842, he called his wife, Emma as president of the “Female Relief Society.” As the charitable arm of the church, it was necessary to the restoration, which “could not be perfect or complete

16 The section on the Bishop’s Storehouse is taken from the interview transcript dated June 27, 2008.
without it.” Emma named two counselors; just as each stake today has a president and two counselors (Church Almanac 2009:145). Today’s Relief Society President oversees all ‘visiting teaching’ in all members’ homes, with one counselor who oversees stake Education and the other stake Enrichment. But, unlike the stake president, the Relief Society does not hold the priesthood, but rather, is under the priesthood. Therefore, the Relief Society answers to the stake president. All Relief Society activities are to “increase the testimony of Jesus Christ and to help women to be better mothers and sisters in the church. This supports them in their individual callings.”

In the Fort Lauderdale Stake, the Relief Society President is an RM from Taiwan (1977-78) who was born in the Alaskan Indian Villages, whose mother is said to be “the first Eskimo baptized LDS.” With a BA in Spanish, she feels her gift is teaching, which is a perfect fit for the Relief Society. As a teacher, she also has a gift for public speaking. At the annual Pembroke Pines Ward Conference, she elaborated on the recent General Conference talk by the Relief Society General President, Julie Beck titled “Mothers Who Know.” Like President Beck, she encouraged young women to get married, “do not postpone having children, point your children toward the temple; and provide a home climate for spiritual growth where marriage is a partnership.”

Following up with her on the role of women, she would “love to see my girls serve missions, as they’d learn so much compassion, revitalization, and serve better in

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17 Enrichment activities can be any edifying activity that enriches the lives of the women. For example, during earlier fieldwork, I had the opportunity to attend an Enrichment Activity where we learned to make sushi as taught by a Japanese member. I was invited to another to learn to make Brazilian chocolate, or brigadeiro, for Valentine’s Day.

18 Interview transcript, Relief Society Counselor dated April 18, 2008.

19 Interview transcript, RSG dated April 13, 2008.

20 Field notes transcription dated April 13, 2008.
callings in later life.” They would “grow in confidence in teaching” because the “light of the gospel touches the investigators and the missionaries, and a mighty change in countenance occurs.” But, “gospel teaching and leadership is technically a priesthood responsibility. All boys ought to serve to learn skills for life. Women and older missionaries enrich the mission field.” In her opinion, while women are strong teachers and bring much to the mission field, “no women will ever hold the priesthood – who would do the nurturing if all women were priesthood holders also?”

From her earliest callings she has been involved in ‘visiting teaching,’ which is the women’s corollary to the priesthood’s ‘home teaching.’ Coordinating the home teaching by the women, it is often in this program that the Relief Society first becomes aware of a family’s difficulties, any needs for welfare services, their levels of activity, and the challenges of retention for new members. Her counselor mentioned that the visiting teaching can be very successful in bringing people back to church. But, there will always be those who are less active, citing the rule of thirds, or perhaps, “if you go wider, active is about 50/50.” She applies a biblical lesson as an explanation:

That is why for many years the [inactive] members are compared in the church with the parable of the ten virgins. So according to that parable no matter what you do, you’re always going to have five who are lazy. Because the church respects the free agency of people and it just works that way. Now we don’t just cross our arms and say that’s the way it is. The church has the very important program of home teaching (priesthood) and visiting teaching (by Relief Society) for all members.”

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21 Interview transcript, RSG, dated April 13, 2008. For more on Mormon women’s roles vis-à-vis institutional roles see Cornwall (2001) and Iannacone and Miles (2001).

22 Interview transcript, Relief Society Counselor dated April 18, 2008.
Inactivity in Mormonism is often thought to be laziness, which is antithetical to eternal progress, and a waste of agency. But surveillance in home and visiting teaching helps to nip back-sliding in the bud.

Teaching emerges as a common feature of all work in the church, whether missionary or stake leadership. This counselor’s main responsibility is to oversee all levels of Relief Society teaching and training for leadership. Such education conforms this stake with the worldwide church every Sunday, pursuant to the guidelines in the Relief Society and Priesthood Manuals. Every Sunday, Latter-day Saints meet for three hour blocks: first hour Sacrament Service followed by a one hour session per age cohort (in this case Relief Society) and one hour for Sunday school. In the Relief Society hour, the counselor explained they “call a teacher for each Sunday for each lesson. So let’s say we have two songs that we teach from the manual, one song from the Ensign from the General Conference. We choose a talk as a Stake decision, and then, the Relief Society President makes that decision.”23 If a month contains a fifth Sunday, they invite the Bishopric to teach the women.

Among her training duties, she assesses “the needs of the sisters” and helps each Sunday’s teacher “to prepare a good lesson, gives them ideas for how to improve teaching, increase participation in the lessons, and increase interaction.” Additionally, there is literacy training provided at the stake level if there is no larger community-wide program.

We have a program where we can teach a sister if she doesn’t know how to read or write, but that is not the only thing. Sometimes they don’t ‘catch the message.’ Part of the program is to help sisters with that comprehension. Or it can just be for fun. We have a good book prepared for that particular teaching for reading

23 Ibid.
and writing. And it covers the major languages. In that they can learn to read and write with the gospel. It is prepared with the scriptures so it provides two purposes: learn the gospel, learn to read and write.\(^\text{24}\)

All of these educational responsibilities fall to the Relief Society’s first counselor who converted along with her husband in Dominican Republic in 1981, the year of the first DR mission. Helping to pioneer the early Dominican church, the first stake was created in Santo Domingo 1986. In the FFLM for the past twenty years, she and her husband, a mission president, have provided much leadership in the wards, branches, stakes, and mission. Their example of first-generation converts who immediately ‘caught the vision’ in their homeland helped to build stakes in Zion there. Once resettled in the U. S. they rapidly assimilated to English wards and climbed the ranks of local leadership, which they said was unexpected by the local leadership. Their model may help change the way Anglo American leaders view their immigrant converts as more ethnic leaders “trickle up” into positions of leadership.

**Language and Leadership**

The recent history of this mission and its demographic changes include a decrease in immigration to the mission and an increase in outmigration, as well as populations shifting within the FFLM, all of which have implications for membership. Transient membership leads to high turnovers in leadership. The church everywhere struggles with retention of members, which also has implications for development of leadership.

Additionally, the leadership confronts tensions in cultural issues including English language predominance and language accommodations. The merging of five stakes

\(^{24}\) Interview transcript, Relief Society Counselor dated April 18, 2008.
into four was a function of changes in stake leadership. A conversation and subsequent
email with a mission president indicated that there was “not enough [stake] leadership.”
The change would help make “leadership more efficient” and therefore, the Miami
Spanish Stake was merged largely into the new Miami South Stake. The former
Miami Spanish Stake’s Hispanic president had been in office since at least 2003.
Because he had held the office for more than five years, this move is suggestive that he
did not have enough supportive leadership around him in layers and layers of stake
positions to be filled. Maintaining leadership has been an ongoing difficulty, as
described by one stake president, having served for ten years. “So, work will bring
them here for six months, a year, for five years, or ten years. My first counselor has
served with me the entire time I’ve been stake president. But I’ve had three second
counselors, who moved due to work assignments.” This mission has long grappled
with transient membership (Gay 1987), where this Americas gateway serves as a portal
more than a long term domicile for many. Temporary membership means temporary
leadership.

Insufficient leadership is also an issue in development. The development of
leadership is part of a larger problem in that the entire church program was pioneered in
the United States in English. It was then exported from Salt Lake City to be pioneered
elsewhere, in stakes with other languages such as the FFLM. The mission president

25 Pursuant to field notes from a phone call with a mission president during the April 2009 General
Conference attended in the FFLM; email reiterating a loss of leadership due to changing demographics
and economic stressors necessitating the stake reconfiguration to serve Miami, in author’s possession,
dated June 20, 2012.

26 The longest serving stake president in Pompano Beach since 1999; interview transcript April 16, 2008.
explained how things “get lost in translation” and the implications for Spanish language accommodation in the FFLM. It is a complex task, worth repeating in full:

The church tried the Spanish stakes also, and we had the Spanish stake in Miami that didn’t work so well. The most important problem that I can see is that all of the program -- everything is available in English – the songs, the activities – everything is in English. And when we go to Spanish units, we feel sometimes even uncomfortable with the way they say some things. It isn’t so bad for us personally, because I used to be a bishop in a ward, but it is not the same [in Spanish]. We feel more comfortable now in the English and it is because of the program that is all in English – everything. In the Spanish, something is missing, lost in translation. When the leaders go for training in the stakes, the training is in English. Sometimes we translate, but they don’t get everything. So when they go to their unit, the program is not implemented correctly. The youth and primary in Spanish are behind the English units because the English units have their leaders who have been trained – and they can go to the Internet and get more information. It is sad; you feel sorry, because you want to help, but it is hard because all information is provided in English. We see these things because we’ve been on both sides. But the [Spanish-speaking] members don’t see this – everything is ok and it is just normal. They don’t feel let down, because they don’t know what it is like in the English wards. [But] can you imagine how hard it is to catch up?27

Despite the fact that the entire church program was pioneered in English,

Spanish-speaking members are the majority in the global church. As fast as the church has expanded globally, it is little surprise that the translation effort to put the massive church program in numerous languages is behind the curve.

However, speaking of his homeland, Dominican Republic, the pioneers of the church are obviously Spanish-speakers and the church is flourishing. He continued,

The mission work is unbelievable. What we baptize here in the whole mission [FFLM] in one year – in the DR three missions baptize that same number in one month. Every month. Everybody is growing at the same rate [in the same

27 Interview transcript dated April 18, 2008.
language, with the same church program materials] – progressing at the same levels. Here [in the FFLM] it is differentiated rates of growth [progress].

This differentiation is due to the church programs predominantly in English, varying language accommodation, and Hispanic member generational preferences. Ultimately, the purpose of the comprehensive church programs at all age levels is to facilitate the maximum spiritual growth in the members, which helps to develop the next generation of leaders growing up in the church. Despite all the change in the FFLM – transient membership, shifting ward and stake boundaries, turnovers in leadership, and language predominance – the stakes continue to grow.

Reorganization and the Suspension of Language-Designations

The reorganization of five stakes into four in the FFLM yielded no language-designated stakes since 1994. The end of stake language designation is another adaptation the leadership makes in the attempt to meet the needs of a large and diverse membership balancing with leadership and resources available. While none of the stakes are language-designated there is still much cultural and linguistic diversity embedded within their wards and branches; aside from various ethnic Spanish-speakers, Creole, and Portuguese, there are Mayan dialects Mam and K’ekchi’, and perhaps twenty Jewish converts along with African Americans and Anglo Americans from the Mormon Culture Region, among others. The church has long held in tension two ideals: language accommodation so that every person could hear the gospel in his

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28 Interview transcript dated April 18, 2008.

29 Interview transcript, April 16, 2008 with Pompano Beach Stake President; and interview transcript, June 29, 2008 with Miami Lakes Stake President.
or her own language; and unity of the saints in wards and stakes. In the U. S., unity has often been interpreted as assimilation. These tensions are visible in the FFLM.

Returning to the mission president, who was a bishop of one early Spanish ward in the FFLM, the early Spanish units (dating to 1971) demonstrated the expectation that English would become the lingua franca. “The original idea of the Spanish unit was meant to be a transition unit [to English].” By overlapping geographic Spanish units with English units in the same building, it was thought a person could gradually assimilate to the English programs and then switch to the English unit. His important account is considered in full:

Now the problem [in] the beginning was that even the stake leaders misunderstood or lacked [the] experience [as] nobody had it—they thought that in one or two years half of the whole ward would be ready to go to the English units. But they forgot about the people, about human nature. That each one of us progresses at our own rate; it is not the same for us with different economic backgrounds where we learned some English in college or school, but it isn’t what way for everybody. The people who started with us twenty years ago, many of them, most of the families that were already mature [in the faith]—they are still there [in Spanish wards]—they stayed in the Spanish stakes and they will never change because they don’t understand enough English to keep progressing in the church. The church has a particular [program with] English terms and terminology that is even more difficult. To read the Book of Mormon in English is not the same as to read another book in English. So, [that expectation] has happened only with the young families—the young couples with their children, of course. The next generation is English-speaking. I would say almost all the kids of couples our age are English-speaking.30

A further analysis shows these 2008 changes at the local unit level. As is evident from the distribution of AMs (Appendix D), Spanish-speaking, Creole-speaking, and ASL missionaries are moved around the mission rather than situated in a single branch or ward. Because stakes, wards, and branches have geographic boundaries, the

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30 Interview transcript April 14, 2008, with a mission president and wife, a relief society counselor.
diffusion of different languages across boundaries is indicative of changing demographics and a shifting policy toward integration rather than languages in enclaves. A closer look at the ward and branch configuration in the new Miami South Stake\(^3^1\) indicates there are “two English-speaking wards, five Spanish wards and a YSA (Young Singles) Branch in the mainland and two branches in the Keys” without identifying which of the local units are the Spanish-speaking as is customary in the names of wards or branches. An email clarification with a mission president explains that a pilot program for multilingual wards is being tested in the Miami South Stake for about one year.\(^3^2\) This program integrates wards, rather than segregating congregations by language, offering Spanish and Creole translations by audio equipment during the Sunday Sacrament meetings conducted in English. Some wards alternate the language for the meeting and the hymns. This integrative pilot program is similar to various alternative language accommodations made during the 1970s, which were met with mixed reviews (Jensen 1987:293; Tullis 1978).

Such an integration experiment was conducted by a bishop, born into an LDS family, and an RM from Portugal, who served in an English-speaking ward in the former Homestead Stake. He had this observation of bilingualism in Miami:

> There are four levels of people in Miami: the lowest is Hispanic non-Spanish speakers (abandoned your native language – they get “the “eye”). Then the Anglos who don’t speak Spanish (feel like foreigners in their own country and left out of most of the important decisions, conversations). Then you’ve got the

\(^3^1\) https://secure.lds.org/units/stake/1,9780,606-1-5-520985,00.html?. Accessed November 15, 2011.

\(^3^2\) Personal email dated February 14, 2012.
Hispanics who speak Spanish that are the majority and it is their town. But the non-Hispanics who speak Spanish kind of get an honorary role.\textsuperscript{33} Because he is bilingual, he feels like he gets “treated better than most Hispanics just because I speak Spanish – it’s like putting forth the effort.”\textsuperscript{34} Putting forth effort, he has collaborated with a friend serving as a Spanish ward bishop to integrate Seminary for high schoolers.

In his ward, Seminary students were segregated by language and met across the hall from each other. And although they went to the same high school, they didn’t get to know each other until returning from missions, and enrolling in collegiate Institute. “In my mind, this is wrong because there are just not that many youth, they should be integrated. Problem was, the Seminary teacher here really only preferred speaking Spanish. There is a sense among the Hispanics that they want to demonstrate they can be independent and don’t want to integrate.” But this bishop was good friends and a soccer player with the bishop of the Spanish-speaking ward, and the Spanish ward was his mother-in-law’s home ward so he and his wife and family were frequent visitors. And as a Spanish-speaker, “I didn’t have that kind of “bubba” attitude.” Besides, he reasoned, his Seminary class was successful and “was composed of two girls whose father was Cuban and mother Guatemalan; my kids mother Colombian; another kid whose father Argentinean and mother English; and another girl’s mother Brazilian, father Anglo; and one Korean. So, why are we separating?” Both Seminary teachers learned English and Spanish, so the two were merged. And the language and cultural tensions emerged.

\textsuperscript{33} Interview transcript, RMO, dated June 23, 2008.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
One parent in the Spanish school got very upset – “my kids need to learn the gospel in Spanish” (hit fist on the table). And I talked to a few people – that is one of the problems of a language ward – they get afraid their kids are going to lose their culture and so they want the church to become this last bastion of cultural [preservation]. Anything that threatens that [culture] becomes a personal threat to them – or, ‘well, you don’t understand,’ or it become us versus them differentiation. I told him there is a three-fold mission of the church: proclaim the gospel, perfect the saints, and redeem the dead. There isn’t a fourth, which is ‘teach my kids Spanish’ but that quickly becomes one. In a language ward that gets confused. You’ll have a class where no one speaks Spanish but they get mad if it isn’t taught in Spanish. And it is like, ‘well, shouldn’t we be teaching the gospel rather than teaching them Spanish?’

Around that time he said Elder Scott, one of the Twelve Apostles, encouraged attendance in English units if possible.

But because there is this idea of demonstrating our self-sufficiency by maintaining this [Spanish] stake, if someone leaves the Spanish ward for an English ward, they’d better have a good explanation – well, because it is betrayal [as seen by those in the Spanish ward]. I’ve seen young kids in their twenties and their parents are like, ‘how dare you betray us like that?’

Ultimately, this tension was resolved since integrating Seminary fell under the jurisdiction of the CES rather than the ward bishops. So when asked, “What is the remedy?” The bishop went on,

I think the remedy is doing like we do – combining activities when we can. Every three months we have a youth fireside done in English in high school that I work with the bishop in the Spanish ward. But we couldn’t change Seminaries because that was an official thing [CES]. So, the bishop and I are having a fireside at my house, we can invite anybody we want. That has helped the wards intermingle more and the youth are getting more intermixed in inter-stake things. Ultimately, it is about their [spiritual] development.

While differing accounts of Spanish-language accommodation show tensions and challenges, especially as successive generations of immigrants integrate into American


36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.
and Mormon life, there is no doubt all Mormons would concur that any church program or activity is to be “about spiritual development.” The tensions exist in how best to develop spiritually – in which language? The programs of the church are better in English according to a Hispanic mission president and his wife, a Relief Society counselor, both of them immigrants who together with their children have rapidly assimilated into English units. On the other hand, to learn whatever is available in Spanish has a powerful appeal to those not as rapidly integrated. While the numbers of Spanish-speaking members is an enduring constituency in the FFLM, the Creole-speaking members have been relatively small in number and increasingly diffuse across the mission.

The case of Creole-speaking congregations is an instructive case in the inverse of the Spanish language demand. During fieldwork in 2003, the new Morningside Branch was opened in the Little Haiti section of Miami, indicative of the demand for Creole. Among new members, Creole-speaking missionaries were assigned to help foster growth in the enclave and retention of members. Migration patterns have since changed. Often, Haitians who successfully land in Miami do not stay – they use South Florida as a stepping stone to larger Haitian communities such as in New York. Larger diasporas foster more opportunities and there is a sense that staying in South Florida, a Haitian runs a higher risk of repatriation. Overall, fewer immigrants are coming to South Florida during fieldwork 2008-2009, according to mission officials. Gradually, the demand for Creole has both decreased, and diffused across the mission. Where small branches of Creole-speakers such as the Morningside Branch and the New River Branch in the Fort Lauderdale Stake were served by Creole-speaking missionaries, now
the Creole missionaries are spread throughout the mission and translations of languages are alternated resulting in no specific Haitian branches. Likewise, the former Portuguese-speaking branches have all been absorbed into English units. At this writing it is not possible to know of the reception of integrated congregations in Miami. But the outcome of Creole-speaking diffusion and loss of ethnic units may well be the fear of the Spanish-speakers in wards where the Seminary classes were merged.

**Leader Entrepreneurialism**

Despite the constant challenges for local leadership, their inspired entrepreneurialism, creativity, and collaboration across cultural barriers has yielded several long term traditions. A mission president, who as a first generation convert and immigrant was not expected to provide much in terms of leadership, gave a few examples of new traditions he implemented. First, as a new bishop in a Spanish ward, he and his wife, who were also temple workers, took their ward members to the temple in Orlando monthly. It quickly spread to the stake and around all the stakes in the mission and is now a mission-wide monthly tradition. “The Orlando temple counts on those two busses every month from the FFLM. And the ward from where that began was our ward.”

Another new tradition is the International Food Festival. “We counted twenty-eight different nationalities in our ward.” All members were invited to come to the activity to celebrate foods, dance, and national traditions. Some Relief Society sisters had served missions in other countries so they brought ethnic dishes as well. After the meal, then they had the show. They donated money for Boy Scouts and youth summer

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38 Interview transcript, Mission President, dated April 18, 2008.
camps. “It was excellent – people were so enthusiastic about the idea – it started in 1994 and today, still, they have this festival. Now almost every ward has a festival.”

Once released as bishop, he was called to the Stake Young Men’s Presidency. “And one of my most important achievements was to give new life to the scouting and young priesthood programs in every unit in the stake. At least, to encourage the members to give time and work for the scout program. Now the stake has a very, very good scout program.”

In addition to successive church callings, they raised three children in the covenant, two sons who have served missions and a daughter marrying while at BYU, and launched a South Florida construction firm that employs their family. One son, who served in Las Vegas, participated in this study. Beginning with their conversions in the DR in 1981 to their activity today, they have set an example for all of their children and spouses and grandchildren (expecting the eighth) who are active in the church in a family lineage of belief and service.

The participants’ collective narratives in Part II of this study demonstrate their diverse formative backgrounds. Many are from the Mormon culture region in deep pioneer lineages of missionaries, a few are from other states, and some are converts from Latin America and the Caribbean, all settled into the cosmopolitan Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission where they are served by mission leaders from Utah and Florida. Most of the active missionaries will likely return to their home stakes, finish college, get married, and start families. The returned missionaries are raising the next generation of missionaries in lineages of belief and service (Hervieu-Léger). As missionaries proclaiming the gospel they restore the new and everlasting covenant as a sacred

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39 Interview transcript, Mission President, dated April 18, 2008.
canopy (Berger’s old paradigm) of belief, belonging, and activity. They are pragmatic and disciplined rational actors, guided by Latter-day revelation. They follow the Heavenly Father’s urgings to go where there are economic opportunities for supporting their families, where they build up stakes in Zion in the FFLM. The participants demonstrate that striving for perfection is a function of keeping their baptismal, priestly, missionary, marriage, and temple covenants to their families, to each other, and with the Heavenly Father, who chose them as the covenant people in this final dispensation. Through covenants, they mobilize and revitalize the faith in contemporary times, avoiding the maladaptive forces of secularization and modernity (new paradigm). These stake leaders have as their task holding their families and members accountable to covenant obligations as well.

These obligations extend to the larger community, where stake leaderships help the poor, and have taken an active role in South Florida’s hurricane relief efforts. Through service to their families and their stake congregations, and the wider South Florida community, these participants ‘magnify their callings,’ admonish their children to ‘get with the program,’ are ‘enduring to the end,’ and are ‘keeping an ‘eternal perspective’ on daily life. Their geographic mission has undergone much change in fifty years pursuant to demographic shifts and economic distress within a cosmopolitan and transient population. However, by perfecting themselves and their families, they are always adapting to the congregations’ member needs. Building up their stakes within the safe boundaries of the covenant community, Mormons ensure they have access to the eternal rites conducted in the temple.
A Temple Announced

“The pinnacle of our religion”\textsuperscript{40} – the announcement of a new temple – coincided with the end of fieldwork for this project, lighting up cyberspace with emails and text messages. In October 2009, the saints in the FFLM were rewarded for their faithfulness with the announcement of the Fort Lauderdale Temple by Thomas S. Monson at the Semi-Annual General Conference. Until the newly announced Fort Lauderdale temple is operable, the Orlando Temple District covers all districts, missions, stakes, wards and branches from Tallahassee to Key West to Jacksonville, Florida; to the Kingsland Georgia Stake just north of Jacksonville; to the Bahamas, Barbados, and Guadeloupe in the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{41} At the June 18, 2011 groundbreaking, Elder Walter F. Gonzales of the Presidency of the Seventy and overseer of the North American Southeast Area “challenged members during this time of construction to keep their covenants, help the less active return to full fellowship and share the message of the Church” (Samuels and Benzion 2011).

The Fort Lauderdale Temple, expected to open in 2014, will serve congregations from Stuart, Florida to the Keys, west to Fort Myers and Naples, the FFLM, and the Bahamas.\textsuperscript{42} The building of a temple represents the greatest regional achievement in membership expansion and spiritual maturation. For it is the most expensive and sacred of all LDS buildings, as the “House of the Lord.” The participant members will conduct their temple work at much greater convenience than driving to Orlando. And,

\textsuperscript{40} A local Miami bishop’s description of the temple in the Miami Herald, Section 1B Local & State, Sunday October, 4, 2009.


the presence of a temple is purported to advance the entire region in an upward trajectory; anecdotally, members discuss improved neighborhoods, there is said to be an uptick in business and economics in temple areas, and it may turn out to be a case of – “build it and they will come” – attracting potential membership from the tens of thousands anticipated to attend the public open house.  

The maturation of a mission area to be rewarded with a temple takes a long time of sustained work – in this case, fifty years. Mormon temples, with no Christian equivalents, serve as the axis mundi for Latter-day Saints as the holiest places on the planet (Packer 2007), uniting families across the cosmos (Nibley 1992). In the new temple, these worthy Mormons will participate in the “conquering of death” (Brown 2012), inviting all their dead relatives into Mormon life. It is in the temple that the spiritual fruits of their daily labor are realized. It is in the temple when they are reminded of their Heavenly Father’s grand plan that faithful Mormons can become gods. “The key to this work is in keeping our covenants. In no other way can we claim and demonstrate the powers of godliness. In a way it is the most fundamental thing we can discuss in the gospel plan, because only covenant makes and covenant keepers can claim the ultimate blessings of the celestial kingdom. Yes, when we talk about covenant keeping, we are talking about the heart and soul of our purpose in mortality” (Holland 2012). Until its dedication in 2014, the saints will dutifully travel to Orlando every month in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. After fifty years of mission progress

43 In August 2008, I attended the public open house of the Twin Falls Idaho Temple. During the five-week open house a total of 159,863 visitors attended. The power of stake presidents is apparent, as reported at LDS Church Temples: “In 1996, the 14 stake presidents serving in the Magic Valley co-authored a letter to President Gordon B. Hinckley expressing their desire for a temple to be built in Twin Falls.” http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/twinfalls/. Accessed February 15, 2012.
and perfection, the announcement of a temple is the highest compliment and acknowledgement of the Latter-day Saints’ hard work in building their own Zion.

For five decades, the norm for the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission has been constant change as branches, wards and stakes have been established, realigned, discontinued, and reconfigured due to continued growth, outmigration, and changing levels of member activity. Although the church is hierarchical and arguably doctrinaire, it is still adaptive and flexible pursuant to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, providing local leadership with the necessary guidance and latitude to cope with and respond to changes on the ground in the multi-cultural membership constituencies. Building strong stakes in Zion, complete with all church programs takes a three-fold mission: proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the saints, and redeeming the dead in the collaboration of all the active Latter-day Saints the covenant can command.
CHAPTER 14
CONCLUSIONS: LIVING THE LATTER-DAY COVENANT

The Latter-day Saints restore their sacred canopy as they make and keep covenants of mission mobilization across the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission. Their utility of the Hebrew concept of covenant yields a richer understanding of the LDS relationship between them and their Heavenly Father, where through modern revelation they are a new covenant people in this final dispensation. This covenant relationship provides the structural boundaries of their religion dependent upon their obedience to the terms of the covenant. Additionally, the term covenant is used to convey those promises made on behalf of the community, which includes missionary work to spread the restoration message. The term covenant is relational, indicating both a connection between God and his people and a link between the people and the world. By living the Latter-day covenant, which, as a complete and total way of life is much more than a covenant social organization, these members restore the ancient covenant through the three-fold mission in modern times.

The Three-Fold Mission in the FFLM

The active members of the FFLM are the people who take seriously the restoration of the new and everlasting covenant through the comprehensive method of the three-fold mission of the church. The three-fold mission – proclaim the gospel, perfect the saints, and redeem the dead – provides the three plausibility structures of the church, mission, stakes, and temples, respectively, through which all activity is mobilized. The missionaries teach that the new and everlasting covenant is the recapitulation of all covenants for all time, from Adam to Abraham to the apostles of Jesus Christ, renewed and revealed only to Joseph Smith, and carried out by his
followers in this final dispensation. The new and everlasting covenant in Mormonism is the amalgam of all things ancient in Hebraic salvation history merged with Christian discipleship, revealed in nineteenth century America to the prophet Joseph Smith. In LDS teachings, for the first time in over fourteen hundred years, prophecy is restored in Mormonism, and along with it the only correct priesthood authority, its mission imperative, its stakes in Zion as the congregational organization, and its temples. As Mormons restore the vertical covenant with God, they keep and make the daily lateral covenants that perfect and bind them to each other in lineages of belief. For Mormons, however, belief is not sufficient; one must enact those beliefs in service. Through modern, rational revelation, some of the old paradigm features are restored through new paradigm mobilization. This particular covenant restoration, with its strict conditions for belonging, and its universal invitation, is the Latter-day covenant.

For Mormons, the restoration of the Latter-day covenant brings the Western Hemisphere into salvation history. Settled by an ancient Israelite family from the lineage of Joseph and visited by Jesus Christ following his resurrection, the Americas, in LDS teachings, are for the first time included in God’s primordial plan of salvation. But this fulfillment is only possible because of modern revelation to Joseph Smith that brought forth the covenant record in the Book of Mormon and its church. In God’s infinite wisdom, nineteenth century America with its divinely inspired Constitution provided the pluralist religious milieu from which the restoration of the Latter-day covenant could proceed to its fulfillment in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, who will reign from Jackson County, Missouri and Jerusalem in the millennium. In fulfillment of Book of Mormon prophecy, the internationalization of the church is largely in the
Americas, where some eighty-five percent of LDS growth has occurred. One mission of expanding growth and vitality is the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission (FFLM).

**Active Missionaries, and Returned Missionaries and Converts**

New missionaries arrived in the FFLM approaching its fiftieth anniversary. Committed to the missionary imperative contained in the Latter-day covenant, a small sample of active proselytizing missionaries, often from pioneer family lineages of missionaries, proclaim the gospel. This is to say, they reiterate the sacred Joseph Smith story, which contains the revelation of the covenant only to them, and in so doing, they invite all to come unto Christ in their church. These young men and women were predisposed to serve by the reference group of their family missionaries and by cultural expectation (for the men), and they were moved by Pauline and Enlightenment missionary motivations. In the FFLM, they were guided by the mission presidency as they encountered the religio-cultural contradictions of inviting all people to start new Mormon lineages of belief even if that resulted in the severance of new converts’ existing lineages. Expecting to return from their missions with honor as returned missionaries, they anticipate adult life in the LDS Church as they finish their educations, find their eternal spouses, and start families, raising the next generation of missionaries.

Returned missionaries have settled in the FFLM, and provide much of the lay leadership throughout the local stakes in Zion, which is where the Mormons work toward Latter-day perfection. This small sample of RMs, often from deep missionary lineages of Mormon pioneers along with some first and second generation converts, provide their oral histories including their predispositions to serve, which were often motivated by particular Mormon testimonial features. Having returned from missions located throughout the Americas, they recall their service, inviting all people, particularly
Lamanites and Catholics, into the Latter-day covenant. Expecting to proselytize, some of them encountered insufficient leadership in local branches where they had to serve as pioneers in establishing wards, stakes, and church programs, and training leaders. Confronted with the religio-cultural problems embedded in asking people into conversion, they recalled successes and failures. In their missionary work, they sought to teach families, imparting the Word of Wisdom, in acculturating new members into Mormonism, teaching away residual and incompatible religio-cultural practices, and fostering retention among new members. These new members, if retained and sufficiently incorporated into Mormonism, will become the next local leaders and raise the next generation of missionaries in their home countries. Some of these foreign missionaries will also be called to American missions, such as the FFLM.

Having returned honorably, these participants united with converts in the FFLM to lead their stakes in Zion. Having finished higher education, this group of upwardly mobile RMIs are raising the next generation of missionaries in lineages of belief and service. Their mission companionships prepared them for marriage and the questions of the ‘little investigators’ in their households.¹ Also, their experiences in the mission field prepared them for successive callings and leadership roles, which they embrace in the FFLM.

In this mission, with its fifty year history of immigration, transience, and most recent recessionary difficulties, the stakes have realigned in response to new constituencies, language accommodation, and leadership demands. Based on the local congregational needs, these participants serve various callings as they work toward

¹ Interview transcript RSH, dated June 11, 2007.
Latter-day perfection. All members are subject to the leadership of the four stake presidencies and including high counselors. Also subject to the stake leaders, the Relief Society organizes and teaches the women, while the Bishop’ Storehouse serves the increasing numbers of needy in the region.

As a sign of the FFLM’s membership growth and the stakes’ spiritual maturity, the First Presidency announced the building of a temple, which is for Mormons the “pinnacle” of their religion. The most recent indications are that this mission is accelerating its growth since this fieldwork ended. The online church newspaper, the Deseret News, did a feature story on this mission regarding its growth and diversification. According to the mission president, baptisms in the first half of 2011 were 250; in the first half of 2012 baptism were up to 440 (Day 2012). In September 2012, the FFLM was named the number one mission in the North American Southeast Area. By October, the FFLM was named the number one mission in all of North America including Canada and Utah. The goal of 1000 baptisms for 2012 was reached in October. Increasingly, the church continues to diversify as baptisms are increasing particularly among people of African descent in the FFLM.²

**Biases, Limitations, and Recent Developments**

This study began with a question: If Mormon missionaries are instrumental in the growth of the church throughout the Americas, what guides them, what motivates them, and what affect does missionary service have on their lives? Having studied the narratives of converts, many of whom came from fractured families, it was clear that new members found meaning, belonging, purpose, and protection by joining this church

² Email with mission president in possession of the author, dated November 16, 2012.
(Lasater 2003). In other words, these features were suggestive of a sacred canopy. The research imperative was to find out if the sacred canopy was simply a nice metaphor even if unempirical, or if it was a literal structural apparatus that could be identified. By using ethnographic field methods attentive to the phenomenology of everyday Mormon life, the concepts of “making and keeping covenants” in families of missionaries emerged as the engines of Mormon growth and commitment.

Converts also take up this missionary imperative, which led this researcher to the realization that the term “covenant” was both – the structural force and the mobilizing force. Converts make a baptismal covenant to belong to the covenant people; in fact, all Mormons make this same promise, whether born or adopted into the covenant. Further, as a baptismal covenant imperative, they promise to do missionary work and restore the particular covenant throughout the world and the cosmos. And there is more. They also promise to work toward Latter-day perfection by making and keeping covenants every day – to the Heavenly Father and to each other. Every covenant made and kept perpetuates their lineages in a chain of collective memory.

**The Sample**

Conducting research in a multi-cultural mission includes missionaries and converts, leaders and their families all of whom participate in the three-fold mission of the church. Researching growth and cultural diversity, this sample began as a snowball among returned missionaries, who had served throughout the Americas, and are living in the FFLM serving in various callings and leadership positions. To study the highest levels of leadership in the FFLM at the mission level and the stake level, the sample was necessarily expanded to include some converts and RMs from areas of service other than the Americas. Additionally, to study a small sample of active missionaries
working currently in the mission, the mission president and mission office assisted in finding volunteers for three focus groups; and four active missionaries were sent to teach me the lessons.

This final sample, on one hand, is quite diverse and eclectic, with men and women participants from age nineteen to approaching age seventy. They originate from throughout the Americas including Anglo Americans from the Mormon culture region and from the FFLM, and members from various nations and ethnicities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. They are from deep pioneer lineages, and they are first and second generation converts; among them are first and second generation immigrants. On the other hand, the sample was not diverse enough. First, the missionaries who chose to participate in the focus group only included one Hispanic elder. Second, the RM sample did not snowball sufficiently to include enough current Hispanic at the ward bishopric levels. Finally, the overall sample came disproportionately from the Homestead Stake and the Fort Lauderdale Stake.

In an effort to sample more broadly from leadership across all four stakes, each stake president agreed to approve and distribute throughout their leadership a voluntary questionnaire designed to help identify Hispanic leaders. In the end, only the Fort Lauderdale and Homestead stake presidencies participated, which reinforced the existing sample. Where the questionnaire did not go out, the Pompano Beach stake president was released at this same time; the Miami Spanish Stake was dissolved; and the Miami Lakes Stake President ultimately did not participate. Consequently, these questionnaires and the data collected are not included in this manuscript nor were any additional participants secured because of them. Although these deficiencies were
identified, it was not possible to correct them, given the researcher’s major relocation and constraints. A return to the mission field will necessitate a correction of this sampling bias.

**Limitations and Developments**

The limitation of this study was the postponement of research on the third plausibility structure—the temple. Although the fieldwork for this project included preliminary research on the temple lives of a few key families, to have written their narratives into this project would have necessitated three additional chapters. In a tri-part organization, the chapters would have included their earliest participation in the temple; their coming of age patriarchal blessings and endowments for missionary work and marriage; their genealogies and temple work for their dead relatives. Because all Mormon activity is in pursuit of Latter-day perfection to ensure participation in the most sacred and esoteric temple rituals, the gravitas of the temple warrants a project in its own right. As demonstrated in this study, there are tensions within Mormonism and inside Mormon families on the issue of undocumented membership, and the implications for temple practice. In particular, with the new Fort Lauderdale Temple opening in 2014, the timing will be advantageous to fieldwork on the temple lives of many more ethnically diverse members in the FFLM.

Very recently, the church has announced two major structural developments that have implications for the three-fold mission. As fieldwork was drawing to a close late in 2009, the church announced a new ‘four-fold mission’ – adding ‘to care for the poor and needy.’ It remains to be seen how this new emphasis on the poor will change the three-fold mission, where most members assume caring for the poor falls under perfecting the saints. It could be that caring for the poor may come to play a larger role in the global
missionary effort, in which case, the division of proselytizing labor may change. Further, it remains to be seen how the community’s caring for the poor will impact the Mormon emphasis on self-reliance.

A second major development was announced in the October 2012 General Conference that dropped the age-eligibility for proselytizing women to nineteen and men to eighteen. This structural change in age-eligibility will likely encourage more women to apply for missions. More women can be expected to compel more men into service for competitive reasons since mission service is a priestly mark of Mormon masculinity. Further, because the women will be teaching in larger numbers more men will be required to facilitate the conversion baptisms, which women cannot conduct. Ultimately, this study finds that the church’s best hope for expanding, retaining, and sustaining its membership lies in the employment of more missionaries through lineages of belief and service. Missionaries, returned missionaries and their families are the most devoutly religious and committed to serving the three-fold, or four-fold, mission. New converts realize this and immediately encourage their children to serve missions, thereby establishing new missionary lineages. These are two profound structural changes that warrant new research.

As the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints expands around the world, and particularly in the Americas, the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission provides a case study in how an American religion is transforming into a global religion in a gateway metropolis. This narrative, in some ways, is of a marginal religious movement that only has some fourteen million members compared to the Catholic and Muslim, over one billion each. Conversely, as the most successful indigenous Anglo American religion,
its mission, durability, and adaptability provide a study in how religions organize and mobilize through identity, which is to say in the Mormon case, forming missionary lineages of belief and service under the ancient covenant revealed. For these members living the Latter-day covenant, it is a total way of life, a habitus that both structures and mobilizes all aspects of active Mormon life. No other covenant group can lay claim to this particular amalgam of the Hebraic covenant for structural identity appropriated to Christian missionary identity for mobilization. Although Paul tried to wed the two systems, the apostate writing was on the New Testament wall as the earliest Christians substituted sacraments of unconditional grace for God’s conditional covenant ordinances (Reynolds 2005). According to the Latter-day Saints, all Christianity then fell into apostasy. Before John Winthrop ever envisioned the Puritan covenant community, the covenant was long lost. For the Mormons, only their restoration finally recovers the original intention of the Hebraic covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ who provided the missionary model. This missionary model is their calling and no other Christianity employs the notion of covenant as both structural identity and organization at the same time it mobilizes their lives in the three-fold mission.

Through the Mormon restoration of the ancient Hebraic covenant in modern Christian times, the Latter-day Saints defy easy categorization and fit a series of what are considered dichotomous paradigms – a sacred canopy mobilized; the old and new paradigms in the sociology of religion; rational revelation; and individual free agency constrained by the authority of the church as revealed to them. Understanding themselves to be God’s peculiar people of the new and everlasting covenant, and unlike
the chosen people before them, these members will strive tirelessly, 'enduring to the end' through the Mormon three-fold mission.
## APPENDIX A
### SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION PARADIGMS

#### A-1 Comparison of new and old paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>New</th>
<th>Old</th>
<th>LDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A)</strong> Paradigmatic situation</td>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Monopoly</td>
<td>Competitive; seeks monopoly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B)</strong> Best historical fit</td>
<td>Second Great Awakening</td>
<td>Medieval Catholicism</td>
<td>SGA; restoration of Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place and time</td>
<td>United States, 19th c.</td>
<td>Europe, 55-1500</td>
<td>19th c. U. S.; restores ancient Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C)</strong> Master narrative</td>
<td>Revival and routinization</td>
<td>Linear secularization</td>
<td>Revival, routinization; secularization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D)</strong> Master process</td>
<td>Mobilization</td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>Mobilizes; differentiates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E)</strong> Secularity threatens</td>
<td>Irksome demands</td>
<td>Implausible beliefs</td>
<td>Irksome demands; implausible beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F)</strong> Elite prototype</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Prebendary</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G)</strong> View of pluralism</td>
<td>Constitutive</td>
<td>Degenerative</td>
<td>Constitutive; degenerative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H)</strong> Social base</td>
<td>Social groups</td>
<td>Whole society</td>
<td>Social groups; intends whole society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I)</strong> Typical organization</td>
<td>Denomination/congregational</td>
<td>Universal church/parish</td>
<td>Local congregational: universal designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>J)</strong> Function of religion</td>
<td>Solidarity, morale</td>
<td>Explanation, meaning</td>
<td>Solidarity, morale; explanation, meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>K)</strong> Identity</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Taken-for-granted</td>
<td>Contested; taken-for-granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>L)</strong> Recruitment</td>
<td>Emergent, achieved</td>
<td>Primordial, ascribed</td>
<td>Emergent, achieved; primordial, ascribed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Warner, R. S. (1993, p. 1052); *(letters added, LDS juxtaposed, and selectively elaborated by author).*
APPENDIX B
GLOBAL MISSIONARIES AND NEW MEMBERS

B-1 Missionaries in service, new converts, and children of record

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Missionaries Serving</th>
<th>Converts Baptisms</th>
<th>Convert to Missionary Ratio</th>
<th>Children of Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-31-01</td>
<td>60,850</td>
<td>292,612</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>69,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-31-02</td>
<td>61,638</td>
<td>283,138</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>81,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-31-03</td>
<td>56,237</td>
<td>242,923</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>99,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-31-04</td>
<td>51,067</td>
<td>241,239</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>98,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-31-05</td>
<td>52,060</td>
<td>243,108</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>93,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-31-06</td>
<td>53,164</td>
<td>272,845</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>94,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-31-07</td>
<td>52,686</td>
<td>279,218</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>93,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-11-09</td>
<td>52,109</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01-01-10</td>
<td>51,736</td>
<td>280,106</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>119,722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01-01-11</td>
<td>52,225</td>
<td>272,814</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>120,528</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1 This reduction in missionaries is attributed to the “raising of the bar” according to local leaders. The 61 thousand in service had prior been dispatched to the mission field when the “bar-raising” was announced and implemented in late 2002. Implementation of the higher standards of moral, spiritual and physical fitness yielded over four thousand fewer missionaries and has never returned to the high of 61 thousand, averaging an approximate 52 thousand over the past seven years (December 31, 2004 through January 1, 2011). Although trends are too early to assess, the increased ration of converts to missionaries suggests a reversal of earlier studies that demonstrated the positive relationship between numbers of converts to numbers of missionaries (Hepworth 1999; for statistics dating back to 1940 see Shepherd and Shepherd 1996).

2 The Church Almanac 2010 did not list new convert baptisms or children of record in its Statistical Profile this one particular year, and it changed the date of reporting from year end to October, then to January 1st thereafter.
APPENDIX C
ACTIVE MISSIONARY ORIGINATION, FEBRUARY 2008 & AUGUST 2010

February 2008: 144 AMs\(^1\)

99 called from the proximate areas included in the Mormon Culture Region\(^2\):
- 70 Utah
- 10 Nevada
- 7 Idaho
- 3 Arizona, Mexico
- 2 Colorado, Oregon
- 1 Wyoming, Canada\(^3\)

39 called from U. S. at large:
- 16 California
- 7 Washington
- 3 Texas
- 2 Alaska, Virginia
- 1 Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, Pennsylvania

6 called from abroad:
- 1 Belize, Chile, Germany\(^4\), Korea\(^5\), Peru, South Africa

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\(^1\) Compiled from field notes, February 25, 2008.

\(^2\) D. W. Meinig’s 1965 mapping of an Intermountain sphere of Mormon influence included regions of these seven states plus New Mexico. Canada and Mexico both had pockets of Mormon colonization in the mid-1800s and are therefore included in Meinig’s “Mormon Culture Region.” As Mormonism has expanded an updated version of this cultural mapping would yield a larger sphere demonstrating Meinig’s prediction of an emerging Salt Lake City—Los Angeles axis as the future of Mormonism. Certainly, there is a large presence of Californian born missionaries serving in this mission, second only to those from Utah, the core of the Mormon Culture Region.

\(^3\) A Canadian missionary was living in Scotland at the time of the calling.

\(^4\) A missionary called from Germany was an American citizen whose father was serving as a civilian abroad in the U. S. military.

\(^5\) A missionary called from Korea was an American citizen whose father was serving in the military.
Appendix C, cont.

August 2010: 129 AMs

91 called from the proximate areas included in the Mormon Culture Region:
   60 Utah
   14 Idaho
   5 Nevada
   4 Arizona
   3 Oregon
   2 Colorado
   1 New Mexico, Wyoming, Canada

31 called from U. S. at large:
   12 California
   6 Washington
   3 Texas
   2 Ohio, Hawaii
   1 Connecticut, Indiana, Montana, Nebraska, New York, Tennessee

7 called from abroad:
   2 Honduras, Puerto Rico
   1 El Salvador, Kenya, New Zealand

---

APPENDIX D
ACTIVE MISSIONARY ZONES & LANGUAGES, FEBRUARY 2008 & AUGUST 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feb. 2008¹</th>
<th>Aug. 2010²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 zones</td>
<td>8 zones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total in service</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Northerly (including Ft. Lauderdale)

| WPB | 14 | WPB | 16 |
| Coral Sprs | 20 | Coral Sprs | 18 |
| Ft. Laud | 14 | Ft. Laud | 18 |
| Hollywood | 17 | Hollywood | 15 |
| Languages | 3 | American Sign | 3 |
| | 6 | Creole | 12 |
| | 41 | English | 27 |
| | 15 | Spanish | 25 |

Southerly (including Miami)

| Biscami | 14 | Miami Bch | 16 |
| Hialeah | 14 | Hialeah | 17 |
| Miami | 18 | Miami | 16 |
| Homestead | 14 | Homestead | 10 |
| Kendall | 15 | --- | 59 |
| Languages | --- | American Sign | 2 |
| | 2 | Creole | 2 |
| | 27 | English | 11 |
| | 46 | Spanish | 44 |

¹ All 2008 data from interview transcript with the mission president and wife, February 25, 2008; follow-up email dated March 20, 2008 both in the author’s possession.


³ The men in service include assistants to the Mission President in the home, conducting administrative affairs, and or in the office, conducting missionary logistics such as cars and apartments. In 2008 four assistants were serving in the mission presidency called to Creole (1), English (2), and Spanish (1); and in 2010 three assistants served the mission called to English (2) and Spanish (1). Mission language assignments are not necessarily etched in stone. Many of the missionaries have multiple language capabilities and can be utilized where most needed by the Mission President. Therefore, it is not uncommon for an active missionary to be called in one language but serve in another; or to be called in a language and end up serving the presidency.
APPENDIX E
FLORIDA FORT LAUDERDALE MISSION STAKES & UNITS

Miami Lakes Florida Stake – 11 Units:
  Doral (Spanish) Ward
  El Portal (Spanish) Ward
  Flagler Ward
  Fountainebleau (Spanish) Ward
  Hialeah (Spanish) Ward
  Miami Beach (Spanish) Branch
  Miami Beach Young Singles Adult (YSA) Branch
  Miami Lakes (Spanish) Ward
  Miami Shores Ward
  North Miami Beach (Spanish) Ward
  Palm Springs Ward

Miami Florida South Stake – 9 Units:
  Blue Lagoon Ward (language translation)
  Coral Reef Ward
  Homestead Ward (language translation)
  Key West Branch
  Killian Ward (language translation)
  Marathon Branch
  Riverside Ward (language translation)
  Snapper Creek YSA Branch
  Sunset Ward (language translation)

Fort Lauderdale Florida Stake – 8 Units:
  Davie Ward
  Fort Lauderdale Ward
  Hollywood Ward
  Hollywood Hills (Spanish) Ward
  Nova YSA Branch
  Pines Ward
  Plantation Ward (houses the FFLM mission home)
  Riverside Park (Spanish) Branch

Pompano Beach Florida Stake – 8 Units:
  Boca Raton Ward
  Boynton Beach Ward
  Coconut Creek Ward
  Coral Springs Ward
  Cypress Creek Branch
  Lauderhill (Spanish) Ward
  Palm Beach Ward
  West Palm Beach (Spanish) Ward
## APPENDIX F
STAKES IN THE AMERICAS AGGREGATED BY CHURCH AREA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of Stakes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total stakes worldwide</td>
<td>2,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America (including Canada)</td>
<td>843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central America</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America (all other countries)</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total stakes in the Americas</td>
<td>2,475</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Gayle Lasater Pagnoni received her undergraduate degree from the University of West Florida with a major in cultural anthropology and minor in international relations. Upon graduation she received a research assistantship to pursue her Masters of Arts at Florida International University in Latin American and Caribbean studies with a focus in sociology. Her thesis won the 2003 MALACS Thesis of Distinction entitled Building the Kingdom: Mormons and the Americas. Awarded a teaching assistantship, she attended the University of Florida doctoral program in religion, and successfully defended her dissertation November 30, 2012, receiving her Ph. D. in May 2013.