

IN THIS ISSUE OF LINC

we'll talk about how our relationships with our Mormon neighbors should reflect our relationship with Jesus.

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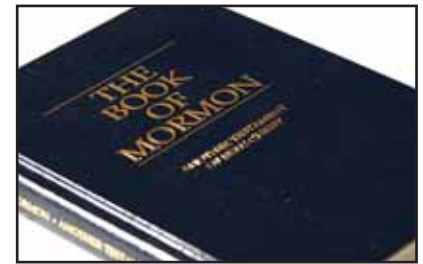
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MEETING THE "MORMON MOMENT" AS FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS



Although several primaries remain, Mitt Romney continues to be a front-runner for the Republican Party's presidential nomination and the most viable Mormon presidential candidate in recent memory.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) is more than 175 years old. It is among the world's fastest-growing religions, claiming more than 14 million adherents, known as Mormons, worldwide. Even so, many Americans are unfamiliar with or ill-informed about it. Romney has had to contend with questions regarding his religion. He's taken pains to highlight the values he shares with evangelical Christians, some of whose influential leaders remain skeptical of Mormonism. Last October, for instance, Pastor Robert Jeffress of the 10,000-member First Baptist Church of Dallas called the LDS Church "a cult" and speculated that evangelical Christians might not be willing to vote for a Mormon.

Romney's candidacy is only one part of what LDS author Neylan McBaine dubs America's "Mormon moment." She points to the successful Broadway musical *The Book of Mormon* as another reason for increased interest in the LDS Church. The show is a satire, but some devout Mormons appreciate it. "Americans think Mormons are all the same," one Mormon audience member told *USA Today*. "This shows diversity and that Mormons can grow and change in their faith."

Cause for Christian Concern?

How should Christians respond to this "Mormon moment"? From the LDS Church's point of view, that question is invalid. "How could anyone seriously doubt that Latter-day Saints are Christians?" asks an essayist on the official LDS website. "Our first article of faith declares our belief in Jesus Christ. We meet every Sunday and partake of the sacrament to renew our faith in and our commitment to Him as the Son of God and the Savior of the world."

The LDS Church uses familiar Christian concepts in ways most Christians find unfamiliar. It doesn't subscribe to the doctrine of the Trinity, and it accepts the Book of Mormon as "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," which reports that the risen Jesus' appeared to native peoples in the Americas.

Arguments over whether Mormons are or aren't Christian often miss the point. Christians will find their thinking about Mormonism and their relationships with Mormons better served by treating the LDS Church as what it is: a relatively new but major world religion, with distinctive doctrines and practices, entitled to the same respect we should give other faiths and we would hope to receive in turn.

Love Your LDS Neighbor

Jesus didn't command us to love our neighbors only if they happened to believe as we do. His directive was definitive, and without qualification, echoing the historic practice of Israel: "You will love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31; see Leviticus 19:18; Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8).

So, how do we love our Mormon neighbor? First, by refusing to perpetuate the falsehoods, misconceptions, and myths that still dog the LDS Church (see Page 4). God calls God's people to contribute to harmony by being truth-tellers. Second, by witnessing to our own faith. Mormons make claims about God and Jesus that most Christians reject. Instead of being defensive or disparaging, we can simply and lovingly testify to what "we have seen and heard" concerning "the word of life" (see 1 John 1:1-3). Finally, we can recognize God at work beyond the boundaries of our faith communities. Mormons and many others of different or even no religion do God's work (knowingly or not) in our communities. Since God has commissioned us to seek the common good, we should cooperate with them as a part of our Christian discipleship.

Truthful Tongues

Proverbs 6:16-19

[The LORD hates] a false witness who breathes lies, and one who causes conflicts among relatives.

—Proverbs 6:19

Commentary: This poetic list of (mis)behaviors that God hates may strike us as strange, at first. For starters, couldn't Israelite sages count—which is it, six or seven (see 6:16)?

Actually the poem just uses a numerical formula common in ancient literature, probably as a memory aid. More to the point: Aren't some of the actions listed worse than others? Is telling lies truly as bad as murder (see 6:17)? Is contemplating "wicked plans" equivalent to carrying them out (see 6:18)? Israel's wisdom teachers knew that if we don't respect and love our neighbors enough to think and tell the truth about them, we run the risk of causing conflict—conflict that could even turn deadly. In the Hebrew, verse 19 mentions "brothers," a word that often means more than biological male siblings.

We should think of our Mormon neighbors first of all as our brothers and sisters in the human family. Lies, misunderstandings, and myths about their faith have long circulated, sometimes leading to violence and death. We should learn what's true and what's not about LDS faith, resolving never to perpetuate falsehoods with lying tongues of our own.

Questions to talk about:

- How does falsehood lead to conflict?
- How do you fact check what "everybody knows" in order to learn the truth?

What Have You Seen and Heard?

1 John 1:1-4

What we have seen and heard, we also announce it to you so that you can have fellowship with us.

—1 John 1:3

Commentary: John was writing to his fellow first-century Christians in hopes of strengthening them in their faith; but his letter is instructive for Jesus' witnesses today as we tell the world, including those who don't share our beliefs, about Christ.

Talking about our faith with Mormons is difficult because, while they share much of our Christian vocabulary, they do not share our beliefs about Jesus. But our job as witnesses is not to dismantle other people's doctrines or to cross-examine their testimonies. Our job is to say what we know to be true and to talk about our experience of Christ.

When we live and work and talk with our Mormon neighbors today, we can (as Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) guidelines suggest) "witness to [our] own faith rather than [be] speaking against the other." Joyfully share your faith in Jesus, boldly trusting, as did his first followers, that the Holy Spirit is at work.

Questions to talk about:

- How have you "seen and heard" Jesus at work in your life, in your congregation, in your community, and in the world?
- In what ways do you, or could you, witness to the work Jesus has done in your life?
- How can you proclaim your faith without disrespecting or putting down the faith of others?

In Christ's Name?

Luke 9:49-50

Jesus replied, "Don't stop him because whoever isn't against you is for you."

—Luke 9:50

Commentary: Many Christians balk at Mormons' claims that they are Christians, too—but this incident suggests that such arguments about whether Mormons are or are not Christians don't really get us anywhere.

Jesus' disciple John was worried that someone outside of Jesus' group of followers was casting out demons in Jesus' name. This anonymous exorcist was doing things that the supposed insiders had been unable to do (see 9:37-43). John and his fellow disciples had tried to stop this healer, but Jesus had other ideas. He told John, "Don't stop him because whoever isn't against you is for you."

We don't call ourselves "Christian" to boast or to make ourselves out as better than others. Being Christians means being servants who do the work that Christ sets before us. No, Mormons don't share many of our core beliefs; but we, and they, can (and frequently do) work together to serve God and neighbor.

Questions to talk about:

- How do we reconcile Luke 9:50 ("whoever isn't against you is for you") with Luke 11:23 ("Whoever isn't with me is against me")?
- How can and do Christians and Mormons work together in ways that serve God and others?

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The purpose of LINC is to help youth develop Christian identity and live the Christian faith in their contemporary culture.

Writer: Mike Poteet

Editor: Josh Tinley
Production Editor: Pam Shepherd
Template Designer: Ken Strickland
Inherit the Mirth by Cuyler Black

PURPOSE:

To help youth follow Jesus by respecting and loving their Mormon neighbors.

GETTING READY:

You will need Bibles, copies of Youth Pages, pens or pencils, large sheets of paper, markerboard, and markers.

Optional: Multimedia computer with Internet access, video camera, and recording of reflective Christian music.

Note: Advance research on your part may be required for "Working With God, Working With Others" (see below).

Mormons 101 (15 minutes)

To introduce this week's cultural connection, ask and discuss:

- What do you know about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormonism?
- How has Mormonism been in the news lately?
- What questions do you have about Mormonism?

Supplement this discussion with information from Page 1. Consider recording the questions that the youth have about Mormonism on a markerboard. Explain that you'll address many of these questions during the session.

Then distribute copies of Youth Page 6 and invite the youth to review the Top Ten List. Ask youth if they are surprised to learn that any of the individuals listed are Mormons, and/or to name other notable members of the LDS Church.

As time allows, watch one or more brief videos at the official LDS website: <http://mormon.org/videos/>. (Preview your choices in advance; you might consider "Book of Mormon Introduction," "President Gordon B. Hinckley—Palmyra," or some of the personal testimonies.)

Say, "Today we're going to talk about how our relationships with our Mormon neighbors should reflect our relationship with Jesus."

Embodying Truth

(15 minutes)

Distribute copies of Youth Page 4 and review "Mormon Mythbusting" with the youth. Ask, "What about the LDS Church most surprises or interests you?"

Ask youth to find and read **Proverbs 6:16-19**. Then ask:

- Why does this Scripture teach that lying and murder are equally "detestable" to God? What's the connection?
- How can committing ourselves to telling the truth about other religions contribute to harmony in the human family?

Divide the youth into teams of three or four. Ask the teams to imagine a situation in which they might encounter someone in their school, church, or community spreading false information about the LDS Church or another religious tradition. Ask the members of each team to discuss ways they could counter this falsehood with truth. Then invite each team to act out its situation for the others.

Say What You've Seen, Speak What You've Heard (10 minutes)

Say: "Respecting and 'getting right' what Mormons say about themselves doesn't mean we can't tell them what we believe. When we do, however, we should speak up for our own faith, not against theirs. We should focus first on what we do believe, not on what we don't."

Ask youth to find and read **1 John 1:1-4**. Then ask:

- What is John announcing, or testifying to?
- How does John know that what he believes about Christ (the "word of life") is true? (*John's experience of God's revelation*)
- Why does John want to share this testimony? (*to bring others into the fellowship he has with God the Father and with Jesus Christ; to fully know the joy faith brings; to teach that faith is meant to be shared*)

- What can we learn from John about being Jesus' witnesses today? (*John was motivated by love; John spoke from personal experience.*)

Encourage youth to spend a few minutes thinking about and responding to, in words or drawings on the back of one of the Youth Pages, these questions: "How have I experienced Jesus Christ? How can I tell other people about this experience?" If youth have trouble thinking of ideas, remind them that we often experience Christ through the church and in our relationships with others.

Give the youth a few minutes to work, then invite volunteers to present what they drew or wrote.

Working With God, Working With Others (10 minutes)

Recruit three youth to read aloud **Luke 9:49-50** (a narrator, John, and Jesus). Ask:

- Why isn't Jesus worried, as John is, that this other exorcist isn't an "official" follower?
- What does Jesus' response to John teach us about working with people of other faiths to serve God?

As a group, spend a few minutes brainstorming an issue or problem in your community or state that affects youth. On the markerboard list reasons why you believe this issue or problem concerns God.

Now identify a Mormon stake (congregation) in your area, or a congregation of another denomination, (preferably) non-Christian faith tradition, that has an active youth program. (You may want to research this in advance of the session.) Draft an e-mail or letter to that youth program's contact person, proposing joint cooperation to address the identified issue or problem in a way that serves the good of everyone in your community or state. Appoint someone to act as liaison with the other group to facilitate follow-up.

Devotion (5 minutes)

Close with the Devotion, "Putting It in Perspective," on Page 5.



Mormon Mythbusting

As The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has grown and spread throughout the world, myths about Mormons have also spread. Here is the truth behind some common myths related to the LDS Church.

For more information on Mormon beliefs and values, visit www.mormon.org, the official website of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

- **Is there a “Mormon Church”?** Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), founded by Joseph Smith in 1830, aren’t usually offended when called “Mormons,” but the term was originally derogatory. The church encourages use of the term “Saints” or the full name of the church.
- **Isn’t Mormonism mostly an American religion?** Although Mormonism began in this country, less than half of today’s 14 million Saints worldwide live here.
- **Is Mormonism a cult?** No. The LDS Church is a major, established world religious tradition. The LDS Church does not profess the Nicene or Apostles’ Creeds. Its beliefs about God and Jesus don’t agree with historic Christian doctrine. Mormons consider themselves Christian, however, because they believe their faith is authentic New Testament Christianity as restored by God through the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr.
- **Is the Book of Mormon “the Mormon Bible”?** The LDS Articles of Faith state: “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.” The LDS Church officially uses the King James Version of the Bible, which it believes to be the least corrupt translation. Mormons believe an angel named Moroni revealed to Joseph Smith golden plates on which were written, in hieroglyphics, the history of ancient civilizations in North America, descended from exiled Israelites and visited by Jesus after his resurrection. Saints believe that Joseph translated the Book of Mormon from these plates.
- **Do Mormons practice polygamy?** Based on the example of Abraham and on a revelation reported by Joseph Smith, many Mormons took “plural wives” in the past. In 1890, however, facing pressure from the United States government, the Church banned the practice. The LDS Church now excommunicates polygamists.
- **Don’t Mormons believe they will get their own planet after they die?** No. The LDS Church does teach, however (in the words of Joseph Smith), that the “God that sits enthroned is a man like one of yourselves.” God the Father is an “exalted” or “divinized” man, with a physical body. The LDS Church believes that Jesus’ atonement and the fulfillment of LDS rituals allow humans to become gods.
- **Do Mormons wear “magic underwear”?** They don’t believe it’s magic, but Saints do wear a special, close-fitting undergarment to remind them of the covenants they make with God.
- **Don’t Mormons “baptize the dead”?** Based on 1 Corinthians 15:29 and a revelation, the LDS Church baptizes living people as proxies for the deceased. The Church does not teach that this baptism automatically makes them dead Mormons; rather, it gives them a chance to accept or reject LDS baptism.
- **Should he win the Republican nomination, will Mormons be required to vote for Mitt Romney?** No. The LDS Church does not direct its members how to vote.

QUESTION OF THE DAY:
What do you know about Mormons?

CULTURAL CONNECTION:
Mormonism as an Issue in Mitt Romney's Campaign

TOPIC:
Loving Our Mormon Neighbors
Use the information on Page 1 to relate the cultural connection to the topic of how Christians love our Mormon neighbors and to introduce the individual talk topics you choose.

Questions to Get You Started:

- What do you know about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?
- Why has the LDS Church been in the news lately?
- Read "Mormon Mythbusting" (Youth Page 4). What about the LDS Church most surprises or interests you?
- What is your personal experience of Mormons?

For each Talk Topic, ask:

- How do the "Read More" Scriptures add to this discussion?

Talk Topic 1:

Don't Misrepresent Mormons

KEY POINT: MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND MYTHS ABOUT MORMONS PERSIST. GOD CALLS US TO RELATE TO ALL PEOPLE BASED ON TRUTH, NOT TO ACCEPT OR PERPETUATE FALSEHOODS.



The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved.

—1 Corinthians 1:18

Ask:

- Read **Proverbs 6:16-19**. How can lies lead to violence and conflict?
- How can accurately educating ourselves and others about other faiths be a loving action?
- Read **Matthew 7:12**. How does the Golden Rule apply to our relationships with people of other faiths?
- How will you help dispel myths about Mormons and the LDS Church?

Read More: Exodus 20:16; Proverbs 6:16-19; Matthew 7:12; Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

Talk Topic 2:

What We've Seen and Heard

KEY POINT: OUR WITNESS SHOULD NEVER DISRESPECT OR PUT DOWN SOMEONE ELSE'S FAITH. INSTEAD, WHEN WE TALK ABOUT OUR FAITH TO MORMONS OR ANYONE ELSE, WE MUST SIMPLY SHARE OUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD IN JESUS, TRUSTING THE SPIRIT TO WORK THROUGH OUR WITNESS.

Ask:

- How comfortable are you sharing your faith with others? What would help you grow in this area?
- How would you describe your Christian beliefs to others?
- How have you experienced Jesus? How can you tell others about this experience?
- Read **John 4:28-30**. What can we learn from the Samaritan woman about witnessing to Jesus?

- Read **1 Peter 3:15-16**. How can this Scripture guide us in our conversations with people of other faiths?

Read More: Deuteronomy 5:2-3; John 4:28-30, 39-42; 20:29; 1 Peter 3:15-16; 1 John 1:1-4.

Talk Topic 3:

Cooperating for the Common Good

KEY POINT: BELIEVING THAT GOD IS AT WORK BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE CHURCH, WE SEEK TO WORK WITH OTHERS, OF A DIFFERENT OR EVEN NO FAITH, TO PARTICIPATE IN GOD'S MISSION OF LOVE TO THE WORLD.

Ask:

- Read **Mark 9:38-41** and **Luke 9:49-50**. What does the story about the other exorcist teach us about our relationships with people of other faiths?
- Read **Jeremiah 29:7**. How does God's command to seek our community's welfare shape our relationship to all our neighbors?
- Read **Ephesians 2:10**. What "good things" are people of other faiths or no faith doing in your community? How might you support them or become involved?
- How can we work alongside people of other faiths without compromising our Christians beliefs and values?

Read More: Jeremiah 29:7; Mark 9:38-41; Luke 9:49-50; Romans 12:18; Ephesians 2:10.

Gather for Devotion

Putting It in Perspective (5 minutes)

Getting Ready: You will need a Bible and hymnals.

Read aloud **1 Corinthians 1:18**. Say: "Christians are sometimes upset by Mormon belief because the LDS Church uses traditional Christian ideas and language in very untraditional ways. It may be helpful to remember that, two thousand years ago, Christianity was an offshoot sect of Judaism, using traditional Jewish ideas and language in untraditional ways. As Paul's words here indicate, we were once 'weird' in others' eyes, too—and, of course, in many non-Christians' eyes, we still are. It matters what we believe—but God's power and love are greater than any creed. Instead of being angered or frightened by Mormon belief, let's focus on loving Mormons and having honest and respectful conversations while we work together for the common good." Lead youth in a prayer that God will help us better love and work with our Mormon neighbors. Sing, "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy" (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, 121).

In the Bible

MONDAY: Read John 14:6; 15:17—16-17.
How do these words of Jesus, read together, keep us from becoming arrogant about our Christian faith?

TUESDAY: Read Proverbs 15:1-2, 4, 7, 14.
How will you apply these verses' teachings to your conversations with people who practice other faiths?

WEDNESDAY: Read 1 John 1:1-4.
What motivates and makes up a faithful witness to Jesus, according to these verses?

THURSDAY: Read Acts 10:44.
What does this verse teach about the importance of the Holy Spirit as we give our testimony to Jesus?

FRIDAY: Read Romans 10:9-13.
How do you encourage other people to call on the name of the Lord?

SATURDAY: Read John 1:45-46.
For whom would you like to be a Philip, inviting them to "come and see" Jesus? How will you do this?

Top Ten List

Top Ten Notable Mormons in U.S. Society and Culture

10. J.W. "Bill" Marriott, Jr., chairman of Marriott International
9. Gladys Knight, "the Empress of Soul"
8. Julianne Hough, country singer, actor, and dancer
7. Ken Jennings, *Jeopardy!* champion extraordinaire
6. Jon Heder, actor (*Napoleon Dynamite*) and Aaron Eckhart, actor (Harvey Dent in *The Dark Knight*)
5. Roy Halladay, Philadelphia Phillies star pitcher and Bryce Harper, Washington Nationals outfielder
4. Orson Scott Card, science-fiction writer (*Ender's Game*)
3. Stephenie Meyer, author of the *Twilight* novels
2. Hall-of-Fame quarterback Steve Young
1. Six current U.S. Senators, 4 Republicans (Mike Crapo, Orrin Hatch, Dean Heller, Mike Lee) and 2 Democrats (Majority Leader Harry Reid, Tom Udall)

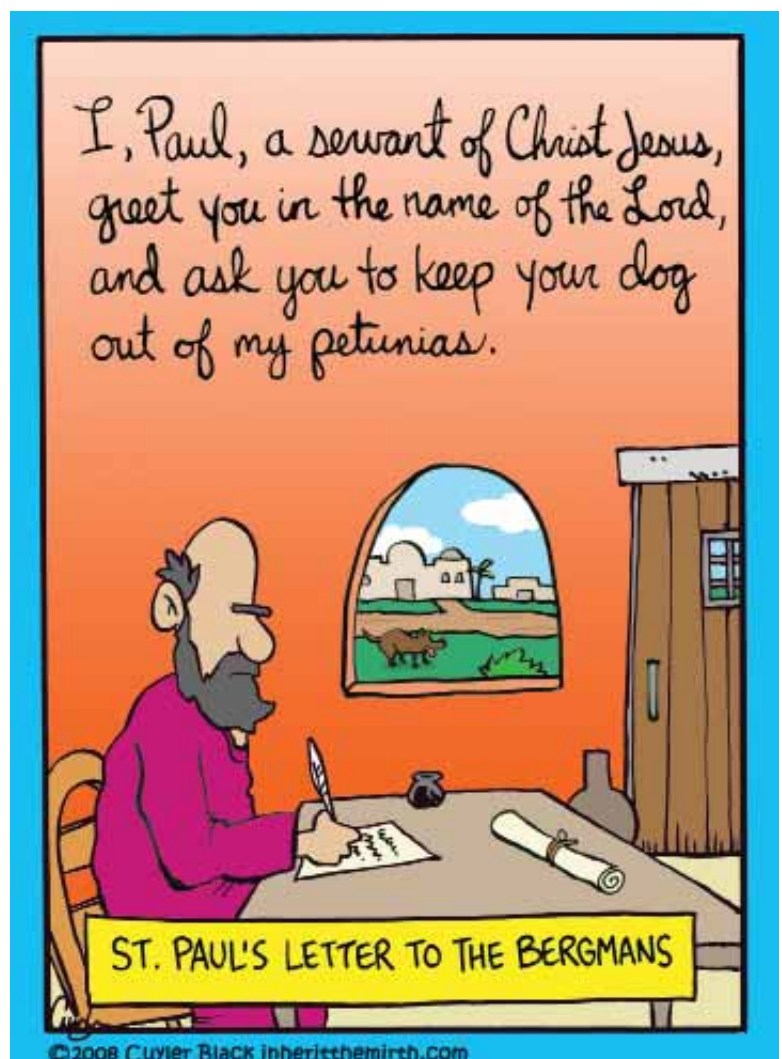
LinC on Facebook and Twitter

Due to some changes at Facebook, we have replaced our Facebook Group with a Facebook Page. "Like" LinC at <http://ow.ly/63qau> and follow LinC (@LinC_AY) on Twitter to get LinC updates, links to articles and videos related to your ministry or the week's cultural connection, and ideas for incorporating each week's lectionary readings into your LinC study.

Next in LinC

In the new movie, *The Vow*, a married woman wakes up in a hospital following a car accident with no memory of her husband or marriage. The situation puts the couple's wedding vows to the test. How can a couple honor their lifetime covenant when one person doesn't even recognize the other? *The Vow* raises all sorts of questions about promises and commitment. Next week we'll look at the covenant relationship we have with God, the promises and commitments we make to God, and the promises and commitments God makes to us.

Inherit the Mirth



What Do You Think?

What is the biggest misconception about Christian faith you'd like to clear up?

Please e-mail your response to us at pshepherd@umpublishing.org or snail mail us at: LinC P.O. Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202-0801.