

## When you invite a Mormon to church... Things to consider

Should you invite Mormon neighbors, friends, and family members to attend your church? Yes, and in the same manner, and for the same reasons you would invite others. But Mormons who accept your invitation will bring with them, not only unique doctrines, but unique experiences from their own church services. Knowing their background can help you avoid embarrassment for your guest.

### The Mormon experience: Mormon church services

Whether your church service is traditional or contemporary, formal or casual, solemn or upbeat—whatever—it is not the service Mormons experience in their own churches week in and week out.

To the extent possible, the Mormon church has standardized services worldwide. Traditionally in their Sunday services:

- Dress is “Sunday best.” Commonly, women wear modest blouses, skirts, dresses; and men, suit or white shirt and tie.
- Families (all ages) attend together.
- No welcoming “coffee” or other social event.
- No public recognition of visitors or “visitors’ cards.”
- Hymnals.\* No contemporary music. Piano and organ only. No clapping or applause. A quiet, solemn, unprompted congregational “amen” may follow testimonies and speeches.
- No offering. No cross or altar.
- No sermon. No paid clergy.\*\* Instead: The first Sunday each month features unstructured comments (testimonies) from members of all ages, affirming their confidence in Mormon religion and prophets, limited only by time. Services last about an hour. Other Sundays feature short speeches by church members, often a family or a few others assigned by the leader on topics he chooses.
- Sacrament (water and bread) is passed weekly. Males, often boys and young men, serve members in the pews. All ages partake. Book of Mormon sacrament prayers are always recited verbatim.\*\*\*

### Their words: What are Mormons talking about?

Mormons call their Sunday services “**sacrament meetings**.” The first sacrament meeting each month is a “**fast and testimony meeting**.” The sacrament meeting is one of three activities in a 3-hour block of classes and other meetings. Non-Mormons may attend these meetings.

More than 27,000 congregations worldwide are called “**wards**,” by design rarely larger than a few hundred members, or “**branches**” (fledgling wards).

A ward is led by a **bishop**, a lay member of the congregation selected by higher church authorities. A **president**, also a layman, may be assigned from outside the congregation to oversee a branch.

Wards are geographical areas. Members attend where they are assigned. Groups of wards are **stakes**. A ward typically meets in a **chapel**, often shared with at least one other ward, but holding separate services and classes. Some wards and branches may meet at **stake centers**, similar to chapels, but larger.

Because facilities are often shared, congregations may hold their meetings at various hours Sunday mornings and afternoons, and reverse the arrangement periodically to share any inconveniences.

For “**fast and testimony**” meetings, members are asked to fast for two meals, saving money for an offering beyond the expected tithe. Tithes and offerings are not paid during services, but are tracked by bishops, who use the information to help determine in periodic private interviews if each member is **active** and **worthy** to attend rituals essential for eternal life.

Mormon **temples** are not used for Sunday services, but to pursue eternal life for the living and the dead. Only worthy Mormons may enter temples to help “save the dead” by baptism by immersion on their behalf, or to attend rituals called **endowment** and **eternal marriage** (or **sealing**) for themselves and on behalf of the dead.

### When you invite.... When a Mormon is your guest

- Introduce your guest (and family if possible) to your church, its members, and your own family through Bible study or social events at your church, or in your home or neighborhood.
- For a church service, dress in a way that will not offend your guest, who is accustomed to and may prefer “Sunday best.”
- To avoid unhelpful curiosity, introduce your guest simply as your friend or neighbor, not—to exaggerate a bit—“the Mormon I was telling you about.”
- Focus on the message delivered in song and sermon; not the style of music and preaching, or the facility. Talk about it.

\* Mormon hymnals include many common Christian hymns, but also many that celebrate the “restoration” of the “one true church” (Mormonism), revere Mormon prophets, or refer to “Gods” or the “Mother” in heaven.

\*\* Mormon males 12 and older commonly believe they have “received the priesthood” and thereby have certain powers and duties and authorities.

\*\*\* In their services Mormons expect non-Mormons not to partake of their water and bread, nor should Christians do so. Even if it is offered, your Mormon guest likely will elect not to partake in a similar service in your church.