

Feeding the Sheep

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In John, chapter 21, verses 15 to 17, Jesus urges Peter three times to feed his sheep. Although there may be various interpretations and translations of this scripture, one can hardly dismiss the commission of Peter to ensure the gospel of Jesus Christ is taught diligently to the children of God (the sheep of the Savior)—so much so that Christ urged him three times to do this.

A Stellar Example of Feeding the Sheep

Each Christian sect will have their own ideas of how to feed the sheep, some doing so more heartily than others. Give the extensive nature of their programs we will examine the practices of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in how they feed the sheep of Jesus Christ. This could likely be seen as the ideal, as the comprehensiveness is quite extreme—much in the spirit of the “three times” Peter was asked to feed the sheep:

Regular Church Services

Church services are typically three hours each Sunday and include something tailored and specific to everyone who attends. The following is a typical worldwide LDS example of regular church services:

Sacrament Meeting: One hour of the three is a sacrament meeting that brings together everyone in a ward or branch to partake of the sacrament, sing, worship, and listen to speakers selected from the congregation on chosen topics (or on occasion local

Church leaders). Generally, the first Sunday of each month is fast and testimony meeting when members are encouraged, as prompted by the Spirit, to come to the podium to bear their testimony.

Sunday School: One hour of the three is dedicated to Sunday school, where children starting at age 3 are taught the gospel of Jesus Christ in the most appropriate setting and method for them. This continues through adulthood. For adults the curriculum rotates on a four-year schedule where each one of the four standard scriptural works is studied in a structured environment: New Testament, Old Testament, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants/Church History.

Third Hour: One hour of the three is dedicated to teaching and activities focused on age appropriate materials, where practical applications of the gospel are taught and reinforced. Male youth ages 12 to 18 are taught the principles of the gospel from an Aaronic priesthood perspective, while female ages 12 to 18 are taught the principles of the gospel from a young women perspective. Adult women go to Relief Society, while adult men go to priesthood where the same lesson is taught to both on practical matters of the gospel. Children 18 months old to 12 years old attend Primary where music, content, and activities teach basic gospel principles.

Official Church Publications

The *Friend* is a monthly Church magazine targeted to children up to 11 years of age. The *New Era* is a monthly Church magazine targeted to youth 12 to 18 years of age. The *Ensign* is a monthly Church magazine targeted at adults. These are key examples of Church publications that provide families with regular inspirational content to feed their minds and spirits.

Each Sunday school class (children through adults) has its own teacher’s manual published by the Church, keeping the curriculum standard throughout most of the world, with simpler versions of the same materials for developing nations.

Each “third hour” adult class (Relief Society, Priesthood, etc.) has a standard curriculum and member manuals,

with opportunities to insert locally selected lessons on selected occasions during the year.

The Church publishes a small handbook for youth called *For the Strength of Youth* that outlines in specific detail the expected standards for Church youth for such things as dress, health, sexual purity, media, and many other guidelines for life as a youth. There is an accompanying pamphlet for adults called the *Guidebook for Parents and Leaders of Youth*, allowing there to be a full handshake of understanding between the youth and those who are shepherding them.

There are many other publications (national and global) that relate to specific educational programs for teachers, families, and individuals that are given on an as-needed basis at the local and national level.

Conferences and Firesides

General Conference: Twice a year (typically the first weeks of April and October) the General Conference of the Church takes place. General Conference includes two, two-hour sessions on both Saturday and Sunday (morning and afternoon), along with a Saturday evening priesthood session of two hours for males age 12 and older. During the ten hours of conference, members listen to music from choirs (including the Mormon Tabernacle Choir) and enjoy talks given by the First Presidency, Quorum of the 12 Apostles, Quorums of the Seventy, the Presiding Bishopric, and Leaders from the General Auxiliaries. The 177th annual General Conference held the first week of April in 2007 was broadcast over 6,000 satellites in 85 countries worldwide and translated simultaneously into 89 languages. This is expected to grow over time.

Firesides and Other National or Global Conferences: There are regular “Church Firesides” where specific topics are addressed for targeted groups such as women, youth, and single adults. There is a Christmas devotional each year and other special conferences and firesides that are designed to teach and edify Church members.

Local Conferences: Each stake and ward has yearly or semi-annual conferences where leaders of the respective organizations address Church members, combined with

music and other special activities to support the conference.

Temple Attendance

Attending the temple is considered a sacred feast by Latter-day Saints. Teaching is conducted, along with service rendered for those who have passed through mortality.

Seminary

All Latter-day Saint youth in high school, freshman through seniors, are urged and typically respond to attending daily seminary classes throughout the school year. Seminary takes place five days a week for approximately 50 minutes each day. This is usually done in the early morning hours before school; however, some youth have access to “release time” seminary where arrangements have been made with school districts to allow students to go to a building to attend seminary during the regular school hours. Seminary covers the four standard scriptural works in succession each year (much like Sunday School), including the Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants/Church History (one each year). Seminary is a great sacrifice for high school students; however, the vast majority of students consider the experience inspiring, educational, and spiritually fulfilling.

Youth Nights

Every week each ward has a youth night (called mutual) where youth ages 12 to 18 (seniors in high school) come together for organized activities focused on the youth. This includes scouting activities for boys. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has an enduring and strong relationship with the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) organization as the activity arm of the Aaronic Priesthood and is looked to frequently by BSA for direction and input to BSA programs and publications. The Church is said to have the largest number of Eagle Scouts per capita of any BSA sponsoring organization in the world.

The youth of the Church also participate in structured spiritual programs that focus on setting and attaining long term spiritual goals—clearly outlined in great detail where all youth are striving for the same worthy objectives, each at their own pace with the help of parents and Church leaders. For the young men there is the *Duty to God* program, and for the young women there is the *Personal Progress* program. Both programs culminate in awards that can be earned for achievement of goals, providing added incentives for the youth to support one another in accomplishing their spiritual objectives.

Especially for Youth (EFY)

Each summer, besides summer camps that are held at the ward and stake level, there is a national program available for youth ages 14 to 18 years of age called *Especially for Youth* (EFY). EFY is held in multiple locations across the United States and offers an environment where youth spend the week learning and experiencing gospel centered lessons and activities with Latter-day Saint youth from all over the world. Each session, regardless of the location, follows a well planned agenda of events that include a rigorous curriculum, special music written and recorded for the session according to a given theme for the year, and teachers that are carefully selected for their ability to relate with and effectively teach youth. The youth stay in Church sanctioned housing and follow well established guidelines for the week.

Local Activities and Programs

In addition to the national and global programs and curriculum, wards and stakes are encouraged to hold activities and programs that are geared toward local members, including social, historical, and educational events—all of which have a spiritual meaning in feeding the flock of Christ.

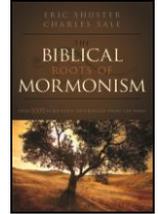
Conclusion

From reading this extensive list of programs one might understand why the Foundation chose to use the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as an example of “feeding the sheep.” Like a restaurant buffet where after paying the price to enter you are given the opportunity to eat as much as you’d like, the LDS Church gives its members a feast everyday to choose from. The price of

admission is to merely accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and become a member in his Church on earth. While membership is the ideal from an LDS standpoint, many of the activities and programs of the LDS Church are made available to everyone—members and non-members alike.

About The Sword Series™

The Sword Series™ is a collection of Christian theological essays that are freely distributed for the education and enjoyment of all. These essays later inspired the book *The Biblical Roots of Mormonism* by Eric Shuster (2010). The views expressed in the Sword Series™ are those of Eric Shuster based upon his study and understanding of the scriptures under the influence of the Holy Ghost. All formatted content in this paper is the property of Eric Shuster and may be distributed freely. Any modification of the content of this paper without the express written consent of Eric Shuster is prohibited. Copyright 2008 ©



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The Foundation for Christian Studies is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study, teaching, and practice of Christianity with an emphasis on the doctrines and principles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism).