

# LAY PRIESTHOOD AND MEMBER PARTICIPATION

The local congregational leader for Latter-day Saints is the bishop (or branch president, for smaller congregations). A bishop holds the priesthood and is ordained to the office of bishop by a more senior Church leader. He earns his own living and receives no pay of any kind for his service in the Church. Although there is no stipulated period of service, it is common for a bishop to serve his congregation for about five years, after which he returns to the body of the congregation or is assigned another responsibility outside it. Other priesthood holders support the bishop in his duties, including two counselors or advisers. In addition, the bishop receives help from a ward council consisting of the men and women who hold distinct, major responsibilities for members of the flock, young and old.

Certain duties in the congregation require a holder of the priesthood to perform them, such as blessing the sacramental emblems of the body (bread) and blood (water) of Christ, formally bestowing a blessing on the sick or baptizing another member into the faith. Only male members hold the priesthood. Responsibilities such as preaching a sermon to the congregation or offering formal prayers in meetings on behalf of the congregation do not require the priesthood and are shared equally between men and women.

The absence of a salaried ministry at the congregational level may be one reason why the tradition of volunteerism is so firmly established within Latter-day Saint communities. Everyone is expected to help, and there is no permanent senior rank of local leaders. A person serving as a bishop today may be sitting in a class next week, being taught by someone who was once an assistant.

Neither is there a sense of rank within the priesthood. Almost all men who are active in the Church hold the office of either elder or high priest. These men meet in groups known as quorums for weekly class instruction and are organized to collectively meet certain needs, such as caring for the poor or helping single-parent families.

In addition to their designated regular service in the congregation, members may donate their time to support the Church's welfare and humanitarian systems. Members also contribute financially at a level that is surprising to many outside the faith. A typical active member donates a tenth of his or her annual income to the Church, in addition to monthly contributions to the needy.

Active Church members typically attend church services for three hours on a Sunday, divided into three different meetings. The main worship service is just over an hour and is known as sacrament meeting. Men and women give pre-assigned talks at the pulpit, and the congregation shares in hymns, prayers and the taking of the "sacrament" – the bread and water emblems of Jesus Christ's atonement for the sins of mankind. The rest of the time is shared between Sunday school and classes for men, women, youth and children. All Sunday meetings are open to everyone, whether or not they are members of the Church.

High-school-age students participate in seminary, a five-day-a-week class that focuses on studying the scriptures. Depending on where the youth live, they could meet during the school day, before school or after school..