

MORMONS IN BIRMINGHAM

The first missionaries to serve outside the USA were sent to Britain in 1837, only seven years after the Church was founded. They arrived in Birmingham in 1840 and by 1847 ten congregations were established there and in the Black Country. But when members were encouraged to emigrate to America to join the main body of the Church, many people sold up and emigrated to Utah, where numerous Mormons today trace their heritage back to the Midlands.

In 1912 the first purpose-built chapel outside of the United States was built in Sycamore Road, Handsworth, and served as the centre of the church in the Birmingham area until it had to be demolished in the 1980s. A new chapel was built on Lordswood Road in Harborne, which serves a large congregation covering most of Birmingham. Such chapels include an area for worship, a multi-functional sports hall, a library and a kitchen. They are used for Sunday services and various weekday activities. Visitors are welcome at all meetings.

Mormons take an active part in community life in Birmingham, partnering with the Salvation Army in donating toys and toiletries to their women's refuge, donating hygiene kits to the Red Cross for use with asylum seekers, and participating in SACRE meetings.

Further information can be obtained online from lds.org.uk, mormon.org.uk or by emailing Pat Wilkinson on longfordpat@outlook.com

BCF

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Originally founded in 1974,
Birmingham Council of Faiths'
objective is to promote knowledge and
mutual understanding of the beliefs
and practices of the city's many
religious faiths.

Its belief is that through greater
understanding of each other, a more
harmonious and cohesive society can
be created.

An additional strategy is to act as an
interfaith hub, networking between the
diverse faith organisations in the city
and to serve as a focal point for
information about their activities.

This brochure is one of ten covering
the Council's affiliated faiths, which
currently include Baha'is, Buddhists,
Christians, Confucians, Hindus, Jains,
Jews, Mormons, Muslims, Sikhs and
Zoroastrians.

Mormons



one of
Birmingham's
faith
communities

MORMON BASICS

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a Christian faith and its members (sometimes called Mormons) believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

The Church was founded in New York State in 1830 by Joseph Smith, who had a vision where God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ appeared to him. He was later visited by an angel named Moroni who delivered a sacred text to him. This text became known as the Book of Mormon which, along with the Bible, forms the foundation of the faith's beliefs and teachings. The name Mormon comes from this scripture which contains teachings of Jesus given to ancient inhabitants of the American continent where He appeared following His resurrection.

It is Mormon belief that God still communicates to His children through prophets. Since the death of Joseph Smith in 1844, each leader of the Church has been revered as a prophet.

Mormons also believe that we lived with Heavenly Parents before we were born, God being the Father of our spirits, and that our purpose in life is to grow and develop through our mortal experiences. Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, everyone will live again after death. All will then be required to account for how well they lived their lives.

The symbol of the angel Moroni blowing a trumpet represents the announcement of the good news of the gospel throughout the world. This statue appears on the top of most Mormon temples.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

The spiritual life of Mormons is a practical one and members are encouraged to learn and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ in their daily living. The focus of the Church is on spiritual learning for everyone regardless of age. As well as worship in chapels, there is daily scripture study and prayer in the home. A high value is also placed on lifelong learning and obtaining as much education as possible.

Sunday is considered a holy day in which to remember Christ's sacrifice for mankind through weekly participation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The Church has no paid clergy; congregation leaders, known as bishops, give their personal time to minister to others. The Church is organised so that members of all ages can contribute, whether in worship, teaching or youth work.

The family is regarded as the most important unit of society and Mormons give high priority to encouraging activities that create meaningful bonds between family members. These include praying together daily, and a weekly 'family home evening' with an emphasis on togetherness: group study and discussion, or just talking with one another, even playing games.

A distinctive teaching is that marriage and family bonds can continue beyond death. This is made possible when parents and children make special promises with God in temples dedicated for that purpose. There are two such temples in Britain, one near Preston and one in Surrey. Temples are considered sacred buildings and only members of the church are admitted.

SOCIAL PRACTICE

Brotherly love and care for all of Heavenly Father's children are at the core of the Church's teachings and members try to put these into practice by serving in the community where they live as well as worldwide.

Mormons fast once a month, abstaining from food and drink for up to 24 hours, and donate the cost of the missed meals to a fund for the relief of those in need. At times of disaster the church responds with donations of clothing, food and medical supplies, often partnering with organisations like the Red Cross, Roman Catholic and Islamic charities. Locally, members donate many hours to community-based projects and Mormon chapels are used as centres for blood donation, polling stations, and for assisting refugee organisations.

Great emphasis is placed on young people, who are encouraged to keep high moral standards, to dress modestly and understand the value of service to others. Many volunteer as full time missionaries for up to two years at their own expense, often involving themselves in educational and medical projects abroad.

Mormons follow a health code known as the Word of Wisdom, which advises against the use of addictive substances such as alcohol, tobacco, drugs, tea and coffee.

They also believe that learning about our ancestors helps us understand who we are and so provide free access to the largest collection of genealogical records in the world at www.familysearch.org. Many chapels contain family history research centres which are open to all members of the public.