

Joseph Smith's flock grew and prospered

By SHIRLEE IDEN

What do Donny and Marie Osmond, George Romney, Morris Udall and Richard Headlee have in common? It's not an aversion to paying taxes or even their public prominence. Each of the above is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints—the Mormons.

One of the world's youngest religions, the Church of the Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints is also one of the most dynamic of our time. The Mormons have more missionaries stationed around the world, 27,000, than have all the other faiths combined.

Worldwide, they have grown from one million to four million in membership in a little over three decades. In this country, their numbers have roughly quadrupled since World War II.

Rugged individualism, civic participation, and a strong belief in the family unit are earmarks of the Mormons. And although the days of the Conestoga wagon are long past, the American pioneer spirit still exists in the religious traditions of America's first home-bred faith—Mormonism.

Less than 150 years old, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints was organized on April 6, 1830, in Seneca County, N. Y. Its first prophet and founder was Joseph Smith, who also became the first president of the church. Five other men participated with Smith in the original organization ceremony.

SMITH had become caught up in the religious revival spirit of the day, but became confused at the conflicting claims of the various faiths.

One day, he retired to a wooded grove near the family farm and prayed for guidance. Two visions appeared to him: God, the father, and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Their message was that Joseph should not join any existing church, but if he proved worthy, the original church founded by Jesus Christ and lost through apostasy, would be restored, as the Bible prophesied, through him.

Three years later, he was directed by a heavenly messenger to a hill where Smith was shown a sacred record containing the religious and secular history of an ancient American civilization.

Four years later, Smith was allowed to take those plates from the hill and the engravings were translated into English and published as "The Book of Mormon."

A history of various civilizations in ancient America between 2200 BC and 420 AD, the volume includes an account of the ministry of Jesus Christ on the American continent after his

crucifixion and subsequent resurrection in the Old World.

Almost from the beginning, Mormons suffered persecution. They were driven from New York to a headquarters in Kirtland, Ohio.

They built their first temple there, but in a few days further persecution drove the members further west. Most of us are familiar with the story of Moses leading the Israelites away from persecution and to the promised land, but few know the story of a similar exodus in this country.

Just as many Europeans came here to escape religious tyranny in Europe, so did the Mormons have to flee farther and farther west from that same tyranny of men.

FROM NEW YORK to Ohio to Missouri and Illinois to Utah the Mormon believers moved. In 1844, Joseph Smith and some of his associates were arrested and jailed in Illinois and on June 27, 1844, a mob forced its way into the Carthage, Ill., jail and killed Smith and another church leader.

Brigham Young succeeded Smith and took his people 1,400 miles across the desert plains to the valley of the Great Salt Lake.

"This is the Place," Young said on their arrival on July 24, 1847. And to this day, Salt Lake City is the center of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints.

Mormons are Christians who believe in living prophets and a life after death. They are proselytizers who would baptize to their faith all the living and the dead that they can reach. They believe that marriage is forever in this life and the life in Paradise beyond. They believe in staying close to their church.

In the early days of the religion, by prophecy, Mormons took multiple wives. This fact of their practice alone led to intense persecution. But also by a revelation, they are forewarned from practicing polygamy today.

TAUGHT the sanctity of single marriage, they are also expected to give one-tenth of their earnings to the church and to abstain from smoking, drinking, from the use of coffee, tea, even the chocolate or cola drinks so many take for granted.

Mormons are taught to work hard and to live so that they will avoid becoming needy. Literacy, education, career development, financial and resource management, home production and storing food are all encouraged.

Bishops like Reed Farrar, the lay leader of their congregations, are responsible for seeking out the poor, needy and distressed and helping them if they are willing to work for the assistance they receive.

Members of the church customarily



Vern Saunders, a member of the Southfield ward, spoke to the congregation at a recent Sunday meeting.

abstain from two meals each month and contribute the money saved or more, to the church for welfare purposes.

Lay members of the church are trained to help find jobs for the unemployed or better jobs for those seeking them. Wards, like parishes, are kept small on purpose, and a stake is a group of wards.

By age eight, members can become



Sometimes church services and meetings can become long for the younger set like Kristin Gollaber (left) and Nathan Gollaber.

baptized and men can assume the lower priesthood by age 12. Up to June of this year, the church accepted blacks as members but denied them the priesthood.

Then, the current president of the church, Spencer Kimball, received a revelation which "has confirmed that the long-promised day has come when every faithful, worthy man in the church can receive the priesthood."

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