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# Blessings and Burdens: How Immigrants to the United States who are Latter-day Saints Perceive the Benefits and Costs of Being Religious

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## **Abstract**

Why do people participate in religion? The popular approach to answer this question in the scientific study of religion is to borrow theories from economics, based on Adam Smith's classic rational choice theory, and apply them to religion. This study attempts to answer this question a different way by using an approach based on qualitative research methods- specifically grounded theory. The findings from this sample of 12 Mormon immigrants indicate that, while respondents were able to identify multiple benefits and costs to participating in Mormonism, they did not think of their decision to participate in religion in economic terms or as the result of a rational comparison of costs versus benefits. I propose alternative approaches to understanding religious participation that are more grounded in the perspectives of the participants in this study. Using migration as an analogy for religious participation, I attempt to bridge the gap between what the respondents say and the goals of social science. I also outline practical implications that religious participation may have for immigrants attempting to fulfill their needs in an environment where they are marginalized and have limited access to publicly funded social programs.

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Ram A. Cnaan

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**BLESSINGS AND BURDENS: HOW IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES  
WHO ARE LATTER-DAY SAINTS PERCEIVE THE BENEFITS AND COSTS  
OF BEING RELIGIOUS**

**Daniel Warren Curtis**

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**Social Welfare**

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**In**

**Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the**

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**Supervisor of Dissertation**

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## ABSTRACT

### **BLESSINGS AND BURDENS: HOW IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES WHO ARE LATTER-DAY SAINTS PERCEIVE THE BENEFITS AND COSTS OF BEING RELIGIOUS**

Daniel Warren Curtis

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Why do people participate in religion? The popular approach to answer this question in the scientific study of religion is to borrow theories from economics, based on Adam Smith's classic rational choice theory, and apply them to religion. This study attempts to answer this question a different way by using an approach based on qualitative research methods- specifically grounded theory. The findings from this sample of 12 Mormon immigrants indicate that, while respondents were able to identify multiple benefits and costs to participating in Mormonism, they did not think of their decision to participate in religion in economic terms or as the result of a rational comparison of costs versus benefits. I propose alternative approaches to understanding religious participation that are more grounded in the perspectives of the participants in this study. Using migration as an analogy for religious participation, I attempt to bridge the gap between what the respondents say and the goals of social science. I also outline practical implications that religious participation may have for immigrants attempting to fulfill their needs in an environment where they are marginalized and have limited access to publicly funded social programs.

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## Introduction

Despite Martin Luther King Jr.'s statement that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, church was where I first encountered diversity. Growing up in the mid-sized town of Kearney, Nebraska, my neighborhood and elementary school was predominantly white and middle class. My father volunteered as the bishop (similar to a pastor or minister) of the local Latter-day Saint congregation. One day, a refugee family from El Salvador moved into the area. The family consisted of a single mother and her sons, and, like my family, happened to be Latter-day Saints.

This mother, who I'll call Elba, needed to find a way to support herself and her sons. My father's position in the congregation gave him the responsibility of finding help for her. So, he decided to give her a job helping my mother take care of me and my eight brothers and sisters. For a few years in my early childhood, Elba and her sons were at our home almost every day. I ate El Salvadorian food, spoke in broken Spanglish, and went to Tae Kwon Do classes with Elba's sons.

Although participating in the Church helped Elba find a job, I'm sure it wasn't easy. Elba's ability to speak English was limited and I imagine that she struggled through the three hours of church services in English. Also, as the only Latino family in the congregation, I also expect that Elba and her sons faced more than their share of prejudice and cultural misunderstandings from other church members.

Seven years after my family left Nebraska, I happened to be passing through the state on a road trip. Since it was Sunday, I attended church at the Latter-day Saint congregation in Scottsbluff. To my surprise, Elba came up to me and gave me a great big



hug. She was older and she spoke English much more clearly; and she was still participating in church services.

I have seen different versions of Elba's situation play out throughout my lifelong involvement with the Church. I have personal friendships with immigrants whose religious participation helped them find jobs, social services, material aid, and friends in addition to spiritual fulfillment. Some immigrants I have spoken to also have shared with me the difficulties of not understanding what is going on at church, of prejudice, and of cultural misunderstandings and tension between themselves and native church members. The immigrants I know through church-whether they are from Africa, Asia, Oceania, Latin America, Canada, or Europe- are normal Latter-day Saints. Our shared religion sometimes makes me feel like I have more in common with them than with many of the non-Latter-day Saint people I know who, like me, were born in the United States.

My experience, and the case of Mormonism, is not unique. Other researchers have argued that religious participation may provide multiple benefits and costs for immigrants to the United States (Chen, 2008; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000). Religious groups in the United States usually do not impose citizenship requirements to access the goods and services they offer the same way the government or sometimes even private businesses are required to do. This freedom has helped religious organizations to become major public advocates for immigrant rights in addition to providing material aid, social activities, religious services, and other benefits. Even religious organizations which are viewed as quite conservative, like the Southern Baptist Convention or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often support liberal immigration policies (Gomez, 2013; Schultzke, 2012).

However, religious organizations often put demands on their members. In a study of Taiwanese immigrants, Chen (2008) notes that,

As a result of their religious commitments, Christians and Buddhists changed their daily habits- what they did, what they read, what they ate, who they interacted with, who and what they obeyed. Religion made demands on these immigrants, often quite rigorous ones. (p.7)

Religious immigrants also face a complex social world. Religious differences can create social tensions in families and communities; and ethnic differences can create tensions within religious organizations. These tensions may make life more difficult for immigrants who choose to participate in religious groups.

The document that you are about to read explores these issues-the costs and benefits of participating in religion- from the perspective of a sample Latter-day Saint immigrants. What are the costs and benefits of participating in Mormonism for immigrants? In researching this question, my goal is to gain greater insight on the subjective experiences of the particular immigrants in my sample and to explore the commonalities and differences between them.

The dissertation will adhere to the following structure: The first two chapters provide background information. Chapter one of this dissertation will describe members of this religious group (Mormonism) and their significance to social scientists. The second chapter of the dissertation discusses immigration in the United States and research describing the relationship between religious organizations and immigrants. This chapter will also specifically address the significance of immigration in the context of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The third chapter describes the conceptual

framework of the study, discussing the scientific theories that informed this study. The fourth chapter describes the methods used and a few of the challenges I experienced implementing them.

Chapter five will go over what I found in my interviews. This chapter addresses the answers to my research questions: Why do these Mormon immigrants choose to participate in the religion? What sacrifices does their participation prompt them to make? Chapter six discusses what practical implications these findings have for individuals working with religious immigrants. Chapter seven discusses the theoretical implications of this research has for theories in the sociology of religion and immigration.

## Chapter 1: Mormons

### Definition of Mormonism

Classifying Mormonism is controversial. Latter-day Saints view themselves as Christians, but they do not consider Mormonism to be part of the traditional forms of Christianity: Protestantism, Catholicism, or Orthodox Christianity. Many Christian groups do not consider Latter-day Saints to be Christian at all, citing theological differences such as the Latter-day Saint belief that God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are three separate beings rather than a single being or the use of scriptures in addition to the Bible (Burke, 2012).

The term “Mormon” also has multiple meanings. It can mean (1) members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, (2) members of the broader Latter Day Saint movement (a religious movement that encompasses multiple religious organizations including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the Community of Christ, and others), and (3) the name of a prophet-historian who compiled multiple scriptural writings to create *The Book of Mormon*. In order to avoid confusion, this dissertation will use the term “Mormon” only to refer to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and not to refer to other religious groups that are also part of the broader Latter Day Saint movement. This usage follows the style guide published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [LDS Church], 2013). The terms “LDS” and “Latter-day Saint” are used interchangeably with “Mormon” throughout the dissertation. Also, I will often shorten the name of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to “the Church” or “the Church of Jesus Christ” in the text and to “LDS

Church” for in-text citations. I will also sometimes use the capitalized “Church” as an adjective referring specifically to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When speaking of church in a more general sense I will not capitalize it.

## **Significance of Mormons**

### *Historical Significance*

Joseph Smith founded The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1830 in upstate New York (Smith, 1980a). To understand the history of Latter-day Saints, it is important to understand that early Latter-day Saints held several beliefs that made them seem strange or even dangerous to outsiders. These beliefs greatly shaped how Latter-day Saints were viewed by the government and individuals of different faiths. The reactions of individuals and institutions to these beliefs precipitated many of the events that made The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints what it is today and shaped the United States as well. From a historical standpoint, the most significant of these doctrines were those of divine revelation beyond the Bible, gathering into a single community, and plural marriage (see Bushman, 2006; Campbell, 1988; Mason, 2010; Moore, 2006).

Latter-day Saints believe in the Bible, but they also believe in additional books of scripture (The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, The Pearl of Great Price) and in a modern prophet who can receive revelations from God on behalf of humanity (LDS Church, 2004). Latter-day Saint theology argues that, shortly after the death of Jesus Christ’s original twelve apostles, God removed the authority to administer his church from the earth. After a period of time in which the true church of God was not on the earth, Latter-day Saints believe that God restored his church by calling on a boy named

Joseph Smith to be a prophet in modern times. Consequently, Latter-day Saints consider their church to be a restoration of the original church set up by Jesus Christ.

For many individuals in the mid to late 1800's, these beliefs made the Mormons heretical. Many people also feared early Mormon prophets, who were seen as exercising too much power over their followers and potentially posing a threat to their neighbors (Bushman, 2006). The power of the Latter-day Saint prophet over his community was especially concerning to non-Latter-day Saints because early Mormons would gather into a single community of believers, soon outnumbering their neighbors. Mormons also tended to vote in blocks, sometimes receiving direction from Church leaders how to vote. This made Latter-day Saints a political threat to the status quo as well as heretical. The fear of Latter-day Saints influencing government through extremely effective political organization prompted much of the animosity towards them in their early history.

Early Latter-day Saints believed in gathering together in one region with the goal of forming "Zion," a community based on religious principles in which poverty would be abolished (see McConkie, 1977). This practice was eventually abandoned, and modern Mormons are encouraged to make wherever they live as close to the ideal of "Zion" as possible. However, the tendency of early Mormons to gather in one area often upset the political status quo and worried the original settlers in the area. Tensions between Mormons and their neighbors often led to violent conflicts. After the murder of Joseph Smith, a group of citizens forced the Mormon's to leave their community in western Illinois. At this time, most Latter-day Saints followed a man named Brigham Young and emigrated from the United States to the intermountain west, a region which was part of Mexico until the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 (Campbell, 1988). However, many

individuals did not follow Brigham Young and formed other churches. The largest of these groups is the Community of Christ, which was formerly named the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Between 1831 and 1835, Joseph Smith began to secretly practice polygamy. Before his murder in 1844, Joseph Smith entered into between 28 and 40 polygamous marriages and began to introduce the doctrine of polygamy to other church leaders (Bushman, 2006). Rumors of polygamy increased tensions between Mormons and their neighbors and were likely a factor in generating additional animosity towards Joseph Smith prior to his murder by a mob. Church leaders publically denied polygamy as late as 1851, after Joseph Smith's death and the migration to the intermountain west. However, by 1852 the fact that many Latter-day Saints practiced plural marriages became public.

The practice of polygamy among Latter-day Saints developed rapidly and was not regulated. The majority of polygamous men had only two wives, although wealthier Latter-day Saint men often had more (Campbell, 1988). Brigham Young, the man who became the prophet after Joseph Smith, married 55 wives (Johnson, 1987).

Because the practice was so unpopular and because there were laws against polygamy, many Latter-day Saints kept their polygamous relationships secret. Consequently, it is very difficult to calculate how many Latter-day Saints were actually involved in polygamous relationships. Estimates of the amount of 19<sup>th</sup> century Mormons involved in polygamy vary from about 10 to 60 percent (Campbell, 1988; Iversen, 1984).

Plural marriage made Mormons extremely politically unpopular and led to several federal laws designed to punish the Church and polygamists (Sears, 2001; Smith, 2010).

These laws served as some of the first legal tests for the First Amendment's protection of religious freedom. Some of the provisions of these laws included depriving Utah women and any individual who believed in the rightfulness of polygamy of the right to vote, seizing Church assets, and the imprisonment of polygamists. Tensions between Mormons and the federal government led President James Buchanan to send 2,500 troops to the Utah territory to maintain federal control in what became known as the "Utah War." The knowledge of the oncoming army invading Utah led to an environment of fear and militarization among many Mormon communities and contributed to the Mountain Meadows Massacre, an incident in which some Mormons in southern Utah organized and carried out a massacre of a wagon train crossing the Utah territory.

Despite initially resisting government pressure, the Church officially abandoned polygamy in 1890. Wilford Woodruff, the president of the Church at the time, issued "the Manifesto" which prohibited Latter-day Saints from entering into polygamous marriages. In a subsequent address, Woodruff indicated that God had told him that it was better to give up polygamy than have Church property confiscated and its members imprisoned (*Doctrine and Covenants, Official Declaration 1*). The Manifesto and excerpts from three of Wilford Woodruff's speeches supporting it have been adopted into Latter-day Saint scriptural canon. Statements from subsequent Church presidents in 1900 and 1904 reaffirmed Woodruff's abandonment of polygamy and indicated that Latter-day Saints entering into polygamous marriages would be excommunicated (Deseret News, 2011).

Abandoning polygamy led to the creation of more splinter groups, many of which currently still practice polygamy. The most prominent of these groups are the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS Church) and the



Apostolic United Brethren. Splinter groups and a history of polygamy have contributed to the continued perception that Mormons are associated with polygamy, over 100 years after the practice officially was abandoned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Keeter & Smith, 2007).

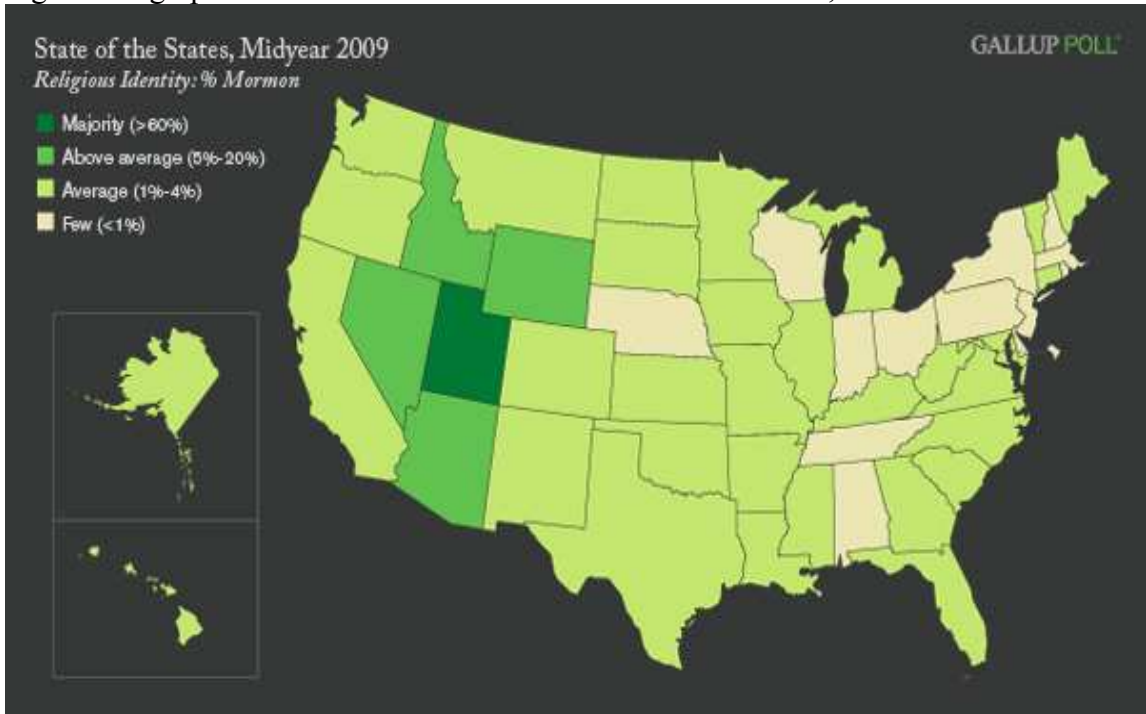
Throughout its 175 year history, the Church has attempted to improve the lives of its members, including immigrants, through various programs. An early Church program, known as the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, operated between 1850 and 1887, and helped over 85,000 Mormon converts immigrate to the United States to help establish Zion (Larson, 1931). Missionary volunteers organized and identified individuals and families that qualified for the program and then organized ships, rail travel, wagon trains, and handcart companies to bring the converts to the Utah territory. The Perpetual Emigration Fund continued until it was dissolved by the federal government and its assets were seized as part of legislation punishing Mormons for polygamy (Larson, 1931; Sears, 2001). Currently, The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints operates multiple universities, a Church welfare program, youth programs, family history libraries, cultural events, and several other programs aimed at improving the lives of their membership and the broader community (Rudd, 1995; Stock & Hiller, 2010; LDS Church, 2013b, c and d).

### *Numerical Significance*

Currently there are about 15 million Mormons worldwide (Hales, 2014), with over 6 million living in the United States (Lawson & Cragun, 2012). In the United States, they make up a similar proportion of the population as do Jews (Smith, 2011). American Latter-day Saints are still concentrated in the western United States and make up about

60% of the population of Utah (PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2009). Figure 1 displays the proportion of each state in the United States that is Mormon based on the results of a 2009 poll by Gallup.

Fig. 1: Geographic distribution of Mormons in the United States, 2009.



Source: (Newport, 2009).

Most Latter-day Saints, however, live outside the United States. Due to a robust missionary program, there are only 33 sovereign nations without an official Mormon congregation (LDS Church Growth, 2013). Latter-day Saints are numerically concentrated in North and South America. Mexico and Brazil both have more than a million members each, the Philippines and Chile both have over a half a million (Lawson & Cragun, 2012). In addition, a substantial proportion of the population of the Pacific island nations of Tonga, Samoa, and American Samoa are Mormon (Adherents.com, 2005).

### *Cultural Significance*

Latter-day Saints also impact the culture of the United States beyond their traditional stronghold in the intermountain west. Several prominent politicians (e.g. Senators Harry Reid (D-NE), Orrin Hatch (R-UT)), artists (e.g. Grammy award winner Gladys Knight, *Twilight* author Stephanie Meyer) and academics (e.g. Harvard professor Clayton Christiansen, historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich) are Mormons (see Haydon, 2011, FamousMormons.net). Notably, the 2012 Republican nominee for president, Mitt Romney, was Mormon. Also, Mormons are the subject of the popular Broadway show *The Book of Mormon*. More controversially, the Church has impacted the political landscape of the United States by advocating against same-sex marriage and for immigration reform (Goldberg, 2008; Canham, 2013).

#### *Significance of Mormons in the Sociology of Religion*

Mormonism is significant in the sociology of religion for three reasons. (1) As a relatively new religious movement, the history of its development is better documented than older religious groups (see Stark, 2005, p.21-22). (2) Mormonism represents one of the more successful religious movements that originated in the United States (Stark, 2005; Lawson & Cragun, 2012). (3) Mormonism is a quintessential example of a “strict church” (Iannaccone, 1994; Stark & Finke, 2000). Of these three, Mormonism as an example of a strict church makes it an ideal candidate for studying religious costs and benefits because strict churches both impose more costs on their membership as well as generate more benefits for their members (Iannaccone, 1994).

In his book, *The Rise of Mormonism*, sociologist Rodney Stark (2005) pointed out that the vast majority of new religious movements die away relatively quickly. Only a very few become global religions, and much of the information regarding how those

religions developed are lost to history. Mormonism, however, presents one of the exceptions to this trend in that its history is relatively recent and is comparatively well-documented. Some of the aspects of successful religious movements that Stark derives from his study of Mormonism include (1) the importance of social networks in promoting conversions to the faith, (2) focusing proselytizing efforts on individuals from doctrinally similar religious groups or without a religious background, (3) the importance of religious groups providing worldly benefits in addition to otherworldly ones, and (4) how social networks are important in validating religious leaders' "revelations."

Economist Laurence Iannaccone, sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, and many other scholars of religion have argued in favor of a rational choice theory of religious participation. Essentially, a rational choice theory of religious participation posits that individuals choose whether to participate in religious organizations based on whether the benefits of participation, from the individual's perspective, outweighs the costs of participation. Iannaccone (1994) as well as Olsen and Perl (2005) have argued that individuals participating in strict religions, like Mormonism, pay a higher price for their participation but also receive more benefits from participating.

Practicing members of strict religions are characterized by "a determination to let their lives be fully guided by their religious convictions" (Stark, 2000, p. 212). Strict religious organizations expect a lot from their members in terms of the time and effort they dedicate to religion and the stigma they are willing to endure for their practices. Latter-day Saints, for example, are expected to donate 10% of their income to the Church and volunteer to support Church programs. In addition, Latter-day Saints are expected to refrain from sexual relationships outside of marriage; adhere to a health code that

prohibits alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea; and endure stigma from others because of their beliefs. A study by the PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life (2009) found that 46% of Mormons perceived a lot of discrimination against Latter-day Saints in the United States.

A study conducted by Cnaan, Evans, and Curtis (2011) found that practicing Latter-day Saints volunteer over 390 hours a year through the Church and that 89% donate at least 10% of their income to the Church. An additional 5% donate to the Church, but less than 10% of their income. The PEW (2009) study mentioned previously found similarly high rates of tithing (79% full tithers and 1% partial tithers) among individuals who self-identify as Mormon over the phone. These strict expectations screen out free-riders by imposing additional religious costs; and fewer free-riders enables the Church of Jesus Christ to produce more and better quality religious goods (Iannaccone, 1994).

Some of the religious goods provided by Mormonism were discovered by Stark (2005) in the book I referred to before. They include the formation of social networks, access to a Church welfare system, and educational opportunities. A more in-depth discussion of religious goods will be presented in Chapter 3.

### **Difficulty of studying**

Mormonism is often difficult for researchers to study. Their relatively small proportion of the population makes them difficult to contact via random sampling, unless the researcher is only interested in focusing on Mormons in the intermountain west. Mormons in Utah are a majority group that is well-represented in government and almost all other social institutions. Practices associated with Mormonism such as not drinking

coffee, tea, or alcohol; not using tobacco; and extensive involvement in religious activities are not stigmatizing in Utah the same way they may be stigmatizing outside of Utah. Also, access to the Church's welfare program is more convenient in areas with a high proportion of Mormon institutions- perhaps translating into increased access to Church welfare for residents of Utah compared to other parts of the United States. Consequently, Mormons in Utah are likely to differ in several aspects when compared to Mormons outside of Utah. For example, research has suggested that practicing Latter-day Saints in Utah are less likely to volunteer for certain causes than practicing Latter-day Saints in other parts of the United States (Cnaan, Evans, & Curtis, 2011).

An additional challenge in studying Mormonism is that knowledge about what is happening in any given Latter-day Saint congregation is spread out among several volunteers rather than concentrated in a professional clergy. There are no local, professional clergy to interview: all Church programs are carried out by volunteers from the congregation that often switch roles and rely heavily on Church manuals published by the worldwide Church leadership based in Salt Lake City, UT.

Also, the Church of Jesus Christ maintains its own research division for producing internal reports and normally does not allow outside groups to conduct any research that would use Church resources. Consequently, the Church does not permit researchers to use its meetings and property (including membership directories and administrative records) for research purposes unless that research is explicitly approved by the Church hierarchy (LDS Church, 2010a).

Initially, the proposed study was going to include a quantitative aspect that would have required permission from the Church to access its meetings. However, due to the

politically sensitive nature of immigration reform in the United States, the request to conduct this quantitative portion was denied (D. Watson, personal communication, April 30, 2013).

In summary, Latter-day Saints are an important religious group because of their historical impact on the United States, their increasing numbers, and the opportunity they present to social scientists to study a young and successful faith. However, the structure of the Church of Jesus Christ makes it difficult for social scientists to study, especially outside of the Church's traditional stronghold in the western United States. Studying Mormon immigrants is even more complicated given the reluctance of the Church hierarchy to alienate individuals who have differing views on how to best incorporate immigrants into the fabric of the United States.

## **Chapter 2: Immigration**

### **Definitions**

For the purposes of this study, an individual is defined as an immigrant to the United States if they fulfill three criteria: (1) they are currently living in the United States, (2) they were born in a country that is not the United States, and (3) their parents were not United States citizens when they were born. This definition is equivalent to the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of "foreign-born" (see Greico et al. 2012a). "Native-born citizens" are defined as citizens living in the same country in which they were born, which in the case of this study is the United States. Occasionally I will use the term "non-immigrant" to refer to native-born citizens.

### **History of immigration to the United States**

Between the Revolutionary War and the mid-1800's, there was relatively little immigration to the United States. However, depressed economic conditions and problems like the Irish Potato Famine in Europe motivated many Europeans to migrate to the United States during the mid-1800's. These immigrants brought new cultures and religious beliefs with them and sometimes these differences in culture and religion created political tensions (Library of Congress, 2013a).

In 1875, the federal government passed its first law regulating immigration to the United States. Known as the Asian Exclusion Act, this law prohibited the immigration of Chinese contract workers and female Chinese prostitutes. The law was often used as justification to exclude any unmarried, Chinese woman from immigrating (Library of Congress, 2013b). Between 1882 and 1934, multiple legal restrictions were created to prevent significant immigration from certain populations to the United States (Brazier,



2000). The Chinese Exclusion Act and the Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan further restricted Asian immigration. The National Origins Quota acts of the 1920s were primarily aimed at curtailing immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, although they also curtailed non-European immigration as well. An 1887 law attempted to prevent Mormon converts from immigrating to the United States by dismantling the Church's immigration assistance program (Larson, 1931).

The cumulative impact of these laws was to substantially limit non-Western European migration (Greico et al., 2012b). However, the federal government amended the Immigration Act in 1965 to lift many of the previous restrictions. The relaxation of immigration laws continued: in 1986 the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) legalized 2.7 million undocumented immigrants and the Immigration Act of 1990 increased the cap on the total number of immigrants entering the United States (Greico et al., 2012b).

Despite these changes to the laws, there are still thousands of people trying to immigrate to the United States who are not able to immigrate legally. IRCA also implemented measures to reduce future undocumented immigration through implementing employer sanctions and increasing border enforcement. In 1996 the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) reduced immigrants' access to social services, including immigrants who had arrived legally. IIRIRA also created a program that encouraged cooperation between federal immigration enforcement and local law enforcement. This program made the situation for undocumented immigrants even more perilous because even minor violations of local laws could eventually result in deportation.

These changes in legislation corresponded with a shift in the demographics of immigration. Immigrants comprised about 14% of the United States population between 1860 and 1920, declined over the next several decades to a low of 4.7% of the population in 1970, and began to rise again until it is currently about 13% of the population (Greico et al., 2012a and b; Singer, 2004). The countries sending immigrants also changed. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that, in 1970, 75% of immigrants were born in Europe. By 2010, 80% of immigrants were born in Latin America or Asia. Individuals born in Latin America comprised over half of the immigrant population in 2010, with 29% of all immigrants being born in Mexico (Greico et al., 2012b).

Prior to the 1930's, immigrants primarily settled in metropolitan areas in the Northeast and Midwest, with some coming through San Francisco. Typical gateway cities at that time included Detroit, Milwaukee, Buffalo, and New York (Singer, 2004). In 1960, over half of all immigrants were concentrated in the Northeast and the Midwest regions of the country; but by 2010 over half were concentrated in the West and the South (Greico et al., 2012b). While cities like New York and San Francisco continue to be important gateways, many other former gateway cities have ceased to attract immigrants and several new gateway cities are emerging in areas traditionally not populated with large amounts of immigrants (Singer, 2004).

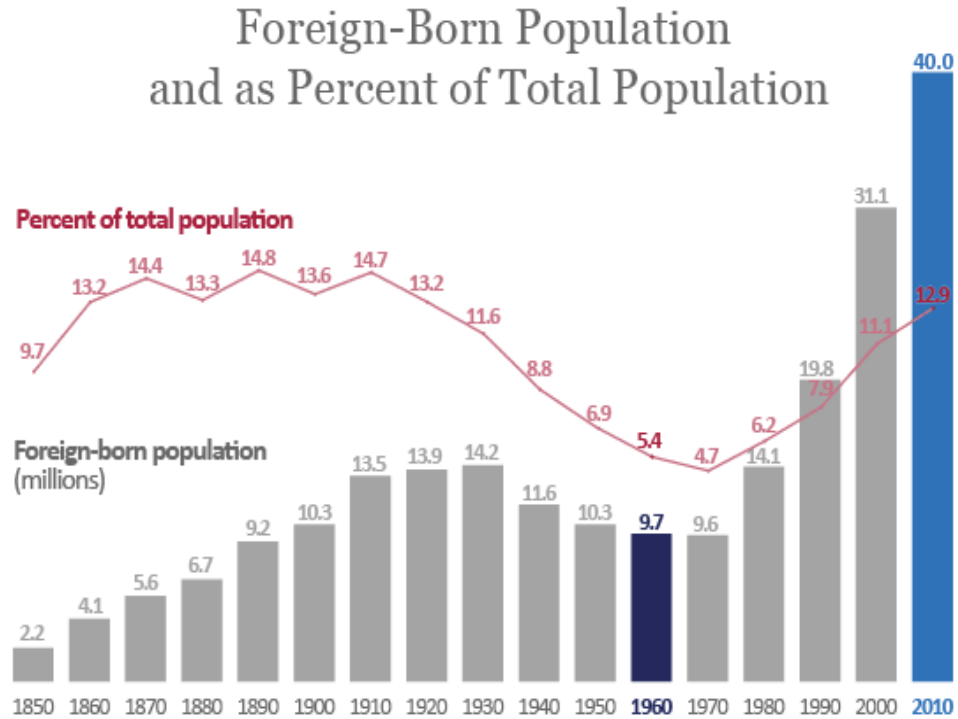
The U.S. Census Bureau reports that about half of the foreign born population in the United States currently lives in only four states: California, New York, Texas, and Florida (Greico et al., 2012a). In addition to these four states, Illinois and New Jersey also are considered important regions of settlement for immigrants (Singer, 2004). However, immigrants are increasingly choosing to settle in regions of the United States

that do not have a long history of immigration (Riosmena & Massey, 2012). During the 1990's, thirteen states saw growth rates in their foreign born populations that were more than double the national rate: Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Arkansas (Singer, 2004). The proportion of immigrants in all states rose over the past two or three decades, including states without established histories of immigrant settlement (Greico et al., 2012b). Immigrants to these new destinations are more likely to be undocumented and not benefit from already existing organizations that have been established to help immigrants fulfill their needs (Riosmena & Massey, 2012; Shihadeh & Winters, 2010).

Currently, immigrants comprise a large and diverse group in the United States. About a quarter of all immigrants to the United States come from Mexico; another quarter from other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean; about a quarter from Asia; and a quarter from Europe, Africa, Canada, and Oceania combined (Greico et al., 2012a). In 2010, immigrants comprised more than an eighth of the entire population of the United States or about 40 million individuals (Greico et al., 2012a). Figure 2 displays a portion of an infographic created by the U.S. Census bureau tracking the number of immigrants in the United States from 1850 to 2010.

Fig. 2. Retrieved from [http://www.census.gov/how/infographics/foreign\\_born.html](http://www.census.gov/how/infographics/foreign_born.html)

## Long-term trends



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1850–2000 Decennial Census; 2010 American Community Survey.

### Significance to the field of Social Welfare

While immigrants make up about 13% of the U.S. population, they comprise 16% of the U.S. labor force (Singer, 2012). Immigrants make up a disproportionate amount of high-skilled and low-skilled workers. Immigrants are disproportionately employed as maids, housekeepers, low-skilled agricultural workers, construction laborers, restaurant workers, but also disproportionately work in high-tech manufacturing, information technology, and medical science industries (Singer, 2012). Many natives consider the low skilled jobs that immigrants perform as too dangerous, too dirty, or too degrading to do themselves (Benach et al., 2010). Immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, are

vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace including low wages, social exclusion, lack of safety training, difficulty accessing medical care when injured, and fear of reprisals for demanding better conditions (Benach et al., 2010).

The U.S. Census Bureau found that immigrants have, on average, lower levels of education, a lower household income, a lower likelihood of having health insurance, and a higher likelihood of living in poverty when compared to native born citizens (Greico et al., 2012a). Immigrants are also less likely to have a bank account, credit, a driver's license, or to report to the police when they are victims of a crime (Peguero, 2008; Yoshikawa, Godfrey, & Rivera, 2008).

Immigrants face multiple barriers to satisfying their needs through government and private market programs. Even if they legally qualify for services immigrants may not access them because of distrust, cultural or linguistic barriers, discrimination, or lack of knowledge. These barriers may be exacerbated in regions without a long history of immigration (i.e. new immigrant destinations) because fewer organizations will have been established to assist immigrants and previous residents may resent the influx of new immigrants (Crowley & Lichter, 2009; Shihadeh & Winters, 2010).

Legal immigration to the United States requires extensive amounts of complicated paperwork, takes a long time, and is often prohibitively expensive. Even if an individual is completely qualified to immigrate to the United States, pays all of the fees, and fills out all of the paperwork correctly, oftentimes their application to obtain a visa is denied for reasons beyond their control like caps on the number of immigrants from their country of origin. Due to the difficulty of legally immigrating to the United States, many individuals choose to immigrate without legal documentation. Other immigrants are brought to the

United States as minors without any documentation. A smaller number are trafficked into the United States without legal documentation against their will to work in illegal businesses.

Immigrants without legal documentation arguably face the most barriers to fulfilling their needs, as they often do not have a legal right to even remain in the country. Current law gives the government the legal authority to deport what would amount to one in three noncitizens residing in the United States (Harvard Law Review, 2013). Since September 11, 2001, enforcement of immigration laws has become increasingly widespread and punitive (Androff et al., 2011). Employers cannot legally hire undocumented immigrants, and some employers who do hire undocumented immigrants use the threat of deportation and the lack of economic opportunities as leverage in instituting poor working conditions or low remuneration (U.S. Immigration Support, 2012). Depending on the state, undocumented immigrants may not be able to obtain a government issued photo id, may not be able to qualify for in-state tuition, may not be legally able to obtain rental housing, may not legally own a firearm, and may not access state welfare benefits (Harvard Law Review, 2013; Androff et al., 2011). Federal law also prohibits undocumented immigrants from accessing most social welfare benefits, limiting the services they receive to temporary housing, disaster relief, and emergency medical assistance (Sanders, 2006; van Ginneken & Gray, 2013).

Other immigrant groups face varying legal barriers depending on their specific status. Documented immigrants who are not naturalized citizens often are required to fill out extensive amounts of paperwork and endure restrictions on their ability to travel, find employment, or obtain public assistance (Androff et al., 2011). Many immigrants must

also be sponsored by an employer or family member in order to remain in the country legally. Also, immigrants can only vote if they are naturalized citizens (USA.gov, 2013). Naturalized citizens are the immigrants who face the fewest legal barriers to accessing resources through public and private channels. The only substantial legal barrier is a five year waiting period after naturalization in which immigrants are not entitled to federal welfare benefits (Borjas, 2002).

In addition to legal barriers to accessing needs and wants, immigrants often face other barriers. Examples include language barriers, discrimination, and barriers associated with their marginalized status (Androff et al., 2011; Greico et al., 2012). These barriers may include poorer health outcomes, lack of educational opportunities, and physical and emotional stress (Androff et al., 2011). Several laws have unintended consequences that make life more difficult for immigrants: racism, forcing families to relocate, and breaking up previously stable families (Ayón et al., 2012). Immigrants may also be fearful or distrustful of social welfare coming from public sources, even if they are legally eligible for it. These additional barriers further complicate immigrants' efforts to access the goods and services they need to maintain an acceptable quality of life.

### **Sociology of immigration**

Immigrants come to the United States to escape negative conditions in their countries of origin, to take advantage of positive conditions in the United States, or a combination of these two reasons. Immigrants who come to the United States to escape negative conditions are responding to what sociologists term "push" factors while immigrants seeking positive conditions are responding to "pull" factors (Dube & Rukema, 2013; Eichenlaub, Tolnay, & Trent, 2010).

Immigration forces groups and individuals from different cultures to interact, resulting in acculturation. Berry (1997) identified four strategies of acculturation for non-dominant cultural groups like immigrants: (1) “Assimilation” refers to a cultural group becoming part of the dominant culture and not preserving their original culture. This approach is often described using the metaphor of a melting pot. (2) “Separation” refers to a cultural group maintaining their original culture, but not becoming part of the dominant culture. (3) “Marginalization” refers to a cultural group not being able to adopt the dominant culture and also not maintaining their original culture. Marginalization is often a result of strong pressures to assimilate but not being accepted when assimilation is attempted. Finally, (4) “integration” refers to a group maintaining its cultural identity but also becoming part of the dominant culture. For integration to happen, the dominant cultural group often needs to change to accept the non-dominant cultural group’s efforts to preserve their original culture. This is often only possible in explicitly multicultural societies.

It is possible for immigrants to implement these strategies differently at a group level, an individual level, and within specific areas of the immigrant’s life. The strategy that is used depends largely on the external pressures placed on the immigrant by the dominant cultural group (Berry, 1997).

Religious participation among immigrants is often viewed as an implementation of these strategies. Specifically, researchers have argued that religious participation among immigrants in the United States facilitates integration (Chen, 2008; Connor & Koenig, 2013). However, religion’s role may vary depending on the immigrants' religious affiliation. For example, Kaya (2007) found that Muslim immigrants may struggle more



than other religious groups to integrate in the United States; and Steffen and Merrill (2011) found that Mormon immigrants are more integrated or assimilated in Utah compared to Catholic immigrants.

### **Immigrants and religion**

Immigration and religion have always been closely intertwined. Holy texts are full of stories of immigration and many religious people use the idea of immigrating to a better place as a metaphor for a spiritual journey towards a better life (either in this world or after death). Religion and religious conflict has also been, and continues to be, an important factor in promoting immigration throughout the world's history. The following section will introduce some of these connections between immigration and religion as well as discuss some ways in which religion supports immigrants.

Immigration has always been a prominent theme in religious texts. The Hebrew Scriptures begin with Adam and Eve leaving the Garden of Eden to settle in the world. The Bible continues with story after story of immigration: Noah and his family fleeing destruction by boarding the ark, ancient humanity being scattered across the world after God confounds their language at Babel, Abraham's travels, Lot's family fleeing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Joseph being taken into Egypt and then encouraging his family to immigrate there, Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and into Canaan, the migration of Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth, the removal of the covenant people from Canaan by the Babylonians and the Assyrians, the resettlement of Israel under King Cyrus of Persia, and many other stories of migration.

The Book of Mormon, similarly to the Bible, also contains several stories of migration: Lehi and his family fleeing Jerusalem, Nephi and his people fleeing Nephi's

brothers, Mosiah the elder and his people leaving the land of Nephi, the people of Zarahemla leaving Jerusalem, Zeniff and his party seeking their ancient homeland, the people of Limhi and of Alma the elder escaping to the land of Zarahemla, and many others. These accounts and other accounts of immigration in holy texts have inspired countless religious individuals.

Immigration and citizenship are also used as a metaphor in many scriptural passages to describe belonging to God's people. In the epistle to the Ephesians in the New Testament, Paul tells converts to Christianity that they "are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19, KJV). In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Alma makes a direct comparison between the divinely directed migration of his ancestors to a promised land and the religious journey embarked on by religious believers:

For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise" (Alma 37:45).

There are several other scriptural examples of migration being used to illustrate theological principles.

Historically, religion has also often been a major factor in prompting immigration. The Protestant reformation prompted numerous people in the 1500's and 1600's to immigrate to territories that would allow them to worship more freely. Possibly drawing strength from religious stories of immigration, the Puritans, the Acadians, the Huguenots, German Anabaptists, and others immigrated to the American continent in order to practice their religious beliefs without fear of persecution. The early Mormon pioneers

fled what was then the United States for the same reason. More recently, European Jews have migrated to the United States and Israel to flee religious persecution in Europe and the former Soviet Union. Currently, people still immigrate to flee religious persecution and the United States recognizes this through its refugee and asylum programs.

Even after taking into account their level of religious participation in their countries of origin, immigrants tend to become more religious after immigrating to the United States (Akresh, 2011; Chen, 2008). One possible explanation for this trend is that religious participation in the United States can offer multiple benefits to immigrants.

Numerous studies have shown that people can receive benefits through religious participation that are far from otherworldly: social connections, social services, material aid, mental health benefits, cultural knowledge, etcetera (Bunn & Wood, 2012; Hackney & Sanders, 2003; McBride, 2007; Nooney & Woodrum, 2002; Cnaan et al., 2006; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Consequently, immigrants often turn to religious institutions in order to meet the needs that they cannot meet through public programs or the market. Immigrants often use religious institutions to preserve and perpetuate their native culture in their new homeland, cope with psychological stress, build social relationships, and fulfill their spiritual needs (Connor, 2012; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Hirschman, 2004; Zarrugh, 2008). Joining a religious organization can also provide an important pathway for immigrants to integrate into society and form an American identity (Chen, 2008; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Hirshman, 2004). Religious institutions may be especially important for immigrants settling in destinations without a long history of immigration, as there are likely to be fewer organizations specifically designed to meet the needs of immigrants (Shihadeh & Winters, 2010).

In addition to these benefits, religious institutions in the United States often provide the social welfare that is needed by immigrants and not provided through other institutions (Hirschman, 2004; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000). Numerous studies in the field of social welfare have shown that religious organizations are heavily involved in providing social services and goods to their communities (Bopp & Fallon, 2013; Cnaan & Newman 2010; Cnaan et al., 2006; Kinney & Carver, 2007; Rudd, 1995). Religious participation may translate into more access to these goods and services because of increased knowledge about the organization's social service activities, more social connections within the organization, or formal eligibility criteria that make accessing the goods and services easier for religious participants. Religious organizations provide social welfare services formally through programs as well as informally through social connections made through the congregation (Cnaan et al., 2006).

Finally, religious organizations have played an important advocacy role on the behalf of immigrants to the United States (Canham, 2013; Kotin, Dyrness, & Irazábal, 2011; Sanders et al., 2013). Several religious organizations have publically advocated on behalf of immigrants and support for liberal immigration policies is positively correlated with religiosity (Knoll, 2009). Individual churches and faith-based networks have actively sought political action that would improve the lives of immigrants or avoid imposing additional hardships on immigrants. As an example, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' support for immigrants has prevented the passing of harsh immigration laws in Utah (Goodstein, 2012).

## **Immigrants and Mormonism**

The PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life (2009) reports that 7% of Mormons in the United States are immigrants, which is smaller than the proportion of immigrants in the general US population. This PEW study also found that converts to the Church are three times more likely to be immigrants than lifelong members, suggesting that Mormon proselytizing efforts appeal more to immigrants than to native-born citizens. The proportion of Mormons who are immigrants resembles the proportion of Protestants who are immigrants; whereas other religious traditions tend to have higher proportions of immigrants. In a study carried out by myself and two other authors of a non-random selection of Latter-day Saint congregations in the Philadelphia area, Michigan, Utah, and California, we found that about 9% of the practicing members were immigrants to the United States (Cnaan et al., 2011).

Since 1850, the Church has established congregations in the United States that conduct services in languages other than English (Embry, 2001). When looking only at the congregations that conducted services in a language other than English in the Cnaan et al. (2011) dataset, the proportion of immigrants rose to about 80%. Fox News Latino (2013) has reported that the number of Spanish-speaking Latter-day Saint congregations in the United States has risen from 389 in the year 2000 to more than 760 in 2013. Data are not available for other foreign language congregations in the United States.

Knoll (2009) found that minority religious groups, including Jews and Mormons, were more likely to support liberal immigration policies. This finding was supported by another study which found that, although Mormons are quite conservative overall, they tend to support liberal immigration policies more than conservative Catholics or

conservative Protestants (Schulzke, 2012). However, the issue of immigration (especially undocumented immigration) is still very controversial among Latter-day Saints in the United States and the Church has attempted to avoid seeming too political in its support for immigrants (see Mortensen, 2011).

One former Church program was specifically designed to help Latter-day Saints trying to immigrate to the United State, but was disbanded by the federal government in 1887 (Lawson, 1931). Perhaps as a consequence of immigration's political sensitivity and the abandonment of the policy of "gathering," there are no official Church programs whose explicit goal is to help immigrants. However, the Church establishes congregations in the United States whose materials and services are in languages other than English. Larger Latter-day Saint congregations are called "wards" and smaller ones are called "branches." In areas of the United States with a significant population of Latter-day Saints who speak a language other than English, foreign language branches are often established. Congregations may locally support programs that specifically benefit immigrants, and there are no formal eligibility criteria for Latter-day Saint programs that would exclude immigrants from participation.

The Church of Jesus Christ administers several programs that potentially benefit immigrants. The Church's formal programs include a Church welfare program, three universities and one college, cultural programs, youth programs, and religious education programs (see Rudd, 1995; BeSmart.com; providentliving.org; lds.org/youth). The Church also encourages informal assistance among its membership by sponsoring social gatherings, preaching about the importance of service, and by strongly encouraging all the members from the same geographic area to attend the same congregation-making

visiting other church members relatively convenient since everyone in the congregation lives in the same area (Cnaan & Curtis, 2013; Embry, 2001).

The Church's home and visiting teaching programs facilitate both informal and formal welfare provision through the congregation. These two programs involve the Church assigning members to visit each other on a monthly basis. The home teaching program usually assigns pairs of men to visit families in the congregation to share a religious message and ensure that the family's material and social needs are being met. If a family is found to be struggling spiritually, financially, or socially, the home teachers take care of the problem or contact local Church leaders to help connect the family with Church resources (LDS Church, 2010b). The visiting teaching program assigns pairs of women to visit other women in the congregation, using similar goals and methods as the home teaching program (LDS Church, 2010c).

Each local congregation has "Melchizedek Priesthood quorums" and a "Relief Society" that oversees its home teaching and visiting teaching programs. Leaders of these organizations often are tasked with assessing welfare needs and reporting what they find to the bishop of the congregation. The bishop serves as the primary gatekeeper for Church welfare funds. While leaders of Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Society presidents often coordinate informal welfare assistance on their own, anything that requires money from the congregation's welfare budget or broader Church resources requires the signature and approval of the bishop. Other than a bishop's approval, there are no formal requirements that an immigrant would need to fulfill before receiving aid from most formal Church welfare programs.

Involvement in the Church may facilitate immigrant integration. One study of Mexican immigrants in Utah found that Latter-day Saint immigrants had higher levels of education, religiosity, and social support than immigrants from other religious groups (Steffen & Merrill, 2011). This same study found that Latter-day Saint immigrants had higher levels of Anglo acculturation; specifically they were significantly more likely to consume English-language media, associate with Anglos, and speak English. However, the study recruited participants through advertisements as opposed to random sampling, so it is unclear how much of the differences between the religious groups are representative of the overall Mexican immigrant population in Utah.

In a study of Latter-day Saints who attend Spanish-speaking congregations in the United States, Embry (1997) found some costs associated with being a Spanish-speaking immigrant in the Church. Some of these costs included cultural misunderstandings with Anglo Mormons, not understanding English language services they used to attend, prejudice, and not being asked to volunteer in Church responsibilities. Also, clergy differed with how they handled illegal immigration and Embry's respondents indicate at least one example where a bishop encouraged undocumented members to return to their countries of origin. In Embry's sample, these participants indicated that worshipping at a Spanish-speaking congregation significantly reduced these problems.

In summary, while relatively little is known about immigrants who are Mormons, there is a strong likelihood that involvement with the Church connects them with both formal and informal services, and is involved in helping integrate them into American society. These benefits potentially form an important component of immigrants' decisions to continue to participate in the Church. Also, some costs for immigrants



associated with participating in the Church may include exposure to prejudice, social tensions in the church, and cultural misunderstandings.

## **Chapter 3: Conceptual framework**

### **Overview of Rational Choice theory in the Sociology of Religion**

The dominant theories in the sociology of religion are rational choice theory and theories that economists have derived from rational choice theory. Rational choice theory argues that individuals act in ways that maximize the benefits they receive. It denies irrational actions and assumes that individuals imagine the future consequences of actions, estimate the costs and benefits associated with those actions, and then choose to act in a way that maximizes the benefit they receive net of the cost. The foundation of rational choice theory is in the field of economics and the writings of Adam Smith (Hak, 1998). Beginning in the 1960's sociologists and economists including Homans, Coleman, Blau, and Becker, began to adopt rational choice theory to explain social phenomena beyond economic transactions.

Several theorists have challenged rational choice theory. One of the many criticisms of rational choice is that it cannot adequately account for collective action and norms like trust and altruism (Scott, 2000). For example, why would an individual refrain from stealing if they are confident that they won't be caught and punished? Some argue that if individuals were acting in accordance with what rational choice theory predicts, almost any attempt at collective action would be stymied by free-riders trying to benefit without paying the cost or people breaking norms in order to maximize their personal gain. Public radio and charities would disappear and items left unattended would be stolen.

Rational choice theorists have responded to this criticism in a variety of ways, including arguing that living in accordance with individual values creates a psychological

benefit. How those values are developed, however, is beyond the scope of rational choice theory's explanative power (Scott, 2000).

Sociologists of religion have also frequently used rational choice theory to explain religious behavior (Iannaccone, 1994; Stark & Finke, 2000; von der Ruhr & Daniels, 2012). Rational choice theory argues that individuals choose to be religious when the benefits of religious participation (also known as religious "goods") outweigh the costs. Ideally, these costs and benefits are calculated from the perspective of the religious individual and include anything the individual receives or expects to receive through religious participation (Stark & Finke, 2000). Consequently material benefits, social benefits, promises of divine help, and anything else that is viewed as beneficial could be interpreted as a religious good if the individual attains it by participating in a religion.

In an analysis of rational choice theory as it is applied to religion, Stolz identified four different types of religious goods or benefits (including social and material benefits) in the literature: (1) Religious goods as other-worldly rewards, e.g. entrance into Heaven, a connection with a higher power, or divine intervention for the benefit of the religious individual. (2) Religious goods as religious membership, i.e. the *belonging* to a particular group. (3) Religious goods as collective goods, i.e. the products of collective religious behavior like sitting in a sermon or praying in a group. (4) Religious goods as household commodities, i.e. goods that are produced by families and individuals for their own consumption. Household commodities can be something concrete, like a meal, or something abstract, like love (2008, p53-56). Stolz then created a new typology, pointing out that religions can produce consumer goods (e.g. statues or meditation classes), membership goods (i.e. rights to church resources based on participation), personal goods

(e.g. a sense of well-being or religious human capital), communal goods (i.e. participation in a communal ritual, like singing in a choir), collective goods (i.e. products or communal action but not the ability to participate in the action), and positional goods (i.e. positions of power or authority within an organization).

Putnam and Campbell (2010) have also highlighted social capital as an important benefit of participating in religious organizations. Religious participation results in relationships that are morally charged. These morally charged relationships can be turned to when religious individuals want to recruit others to volunteer or donate to a cause that interests them. The moral dynamic of the relationships make these requests for labor and donations particularly effective.

On the other hand, some costs mentioned by rational choice theorists include attendance in religious meetings, monetary donations, voluntary labor, participation in stigmatizing activities like wearing distinctive clothing, abstinence from certain behaviors (e.g. alcohol consumption, sex), or anything else a religion requests of its adherents. Often, religious “commitment” is used as a proxy for “cost,” (Iannaccone, 1994; McBride, 2007; Stark & Finke, 2000; von der Ruhr & Daniels, 2012).

### **Group differences**

According to rational choice theory, strict religious groups like the Latter-day Saints produce more benefits for members and also incur more costs from them (Iannaccone, 1994; McBride, 2007). Free-riders, which are individuals who want to consume collectively produced religious goods without paying the cost of producing them, are screened out by requirements strict churches place on their members (Olson & Perl, 2005). By screening out free-riders, strict churches can produce a greater variety and

higher quality religious goods. Consequently, one would expect to see both more religious benefits and more religious costs if studying a strict religious organization.

Additional religious benefits of ethnic congregations have been mentioned in studies of immigrants, including the creation of a venue for immigrants to socialize with culturally-similar individuals in their new homeland, increased integration into the host society, and the provision of social services that cannot be accessed through other means (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Hirschman, 2004; Menjívar, 2006; Park, Roh, & Yeo, 2012; Zarrugh, 2008).

Immigrants may also pay higher costs for religious participation, especially if they participate in congregations where they are a minority. In a study of Latter-day Saints attending Spanish speaking congregations in the United States (many of whom are immigrants), Embry (1997) found that participants occasionally reported prejudice, racism, cultural misunderstandings, and a lack of trust from English speaking church members. These costs were reduced when the participants attended Spanish language religious services instead of English language services.

The differences between lax and strict churches and between immigrants and non-immigrants translate into different levels of costs and benefits experienced by these different groups. Based on the extant literature, one would expect to see immigrant members of strict religious organizations to receive a high level of religious goods (including social, material, and spiritual benefits). Also, this population seems to be paying relatively high amounts of religious costs to produce the religious benefits they enjoy.

## **Determining religious costs and benefits**

There is a major limitation to rational choice theory in studying religious groups. This limitation is that religious costs and goods are subjective. Unlike buying soap, where the costs and benefits are about equal for everyone, deciding whether or not to participate in a religion could have widely different costs and benefits from individual to individual (Bruce, 2008). For example, my decision to participate in a Mormon church versus an Evangelical Christian one depends largely on my subjective belief in the promised benefits of the different religions. If I don't believe the Evangelical church's claim that participation can help me form a relationship with God or get me into Heaven after I die, the benefits of participation are largely reduced in my individual calculation.

Academics also vary with regard to how they define religious goods and costs, and what is defined as a "cost" by one researcher may be defined as a "benefit" by another. For example, if the researcher believes that the individual is using prayer to obtain the benefit of a relationship with the divine, prayer is considered a cost (Stark & Finke, 2000). However, others researchers view prayer in and of itself as valuable (Brown, 2013; Stewart, Adams, Stewart, & Nelson 2013). Similarly, Iannaccone (1990) conceptualized learning religious rituals as a cost. On the other hand, Bruce (2008), believing that learning about religion can be as enjoyable as learning about any other topic, argued that learning religious rituals may be conceptualized as a religious good.

Bruce (2008) pointed out that in order to rationally choose a religious belief, the costs and benefits of participation would need to be known so that they could be compared. The ambiguity and subjectivity involved in distinguishing a religious cost from religious good calls into question the validity of many quantitative studies whose

methods are based on the assumption that religious costs and benefits are about the same for everybody. Also, while social scientists have found ways to quantify some aspects of religiosity (e.g. frequency of prayer, amount of religious donations, etc.), other important potential costs and benefits of religious participation defy quantification (e.g. belief in an afterlife, the strength of one's relationship with the divine, etc.).

### **Other Theories in the Study of Religion**

In addition to rational choice theory, the scholars of religion have borrowed other theories from economics that have their origins in rational choice theory. These theories can be broadly categorized as “demand-side” theories and “supply-side” theories.

Demand-side theories attempt to predict religious behavior by looking at the consumer's point of view and basing predictions on what the scientists believe that consumers want from religion. Supply-side theories try to predict religious behavior by looking at the provider's point of view and basing predictions on how religions react to forces in the religious market. Other theories try to combine the two theories or rely on other economic theories.

The most common demand-side theory is known as secularization theory. Secularization theory argues that as societies become more modern, the demand for religion will be reduced because people will be able to better rely on government, science, and technology in order to fulfill the needs that were previously filled by religion. Secularization theory has fallen out of fashion with many sociologists of religion in recent years (Bruce, 2011; Berger, 2012). The theory has been criticized as Eurocentric and not consistent with empirical observations in America and developing countries. Berger (2012) explained that secularization does not even really fit Europe very well and

what was at first assumed to be secularization was really religious pluralization. A wider variety of religious expression resulted in individual denominations having less influence on society, but religious expression was still thriving in modern societies.

However, some sociologists still vigorously defend the theory. They tend to point out that secularization theory is describing broad societal trends rather than the behavior of individual religious denominations or individuals. Consequently, the decline in religion's influence in more modernized societies over other institutions, like the government, support secularization theory despite the fact that certain religious denominations are thriving or that individuals may still consider themselves to be spiritual even though they do not attend an organized religious group (Bruce, 2011).

On the supply-side, theorists tend to focus on religious competition. One of the main arguments of supply-side religious theorists is that as religious pluralism increases, religions need to compete for religious market niches. This competition tends to increase religious participation as religious individuals strive to produce more and higher quality religious "goods" in order to survive in a competitive religious market. As evidence to support supply-side theories of religious participation, researchers will point to the different levels of religious participation in nations with an established church supported by the government compared to nations with a more vigorous religious marketplace. Supply-side theories are currently fashionable in the scientific study of religion, but they are not without their critics (Lawson & Cragun, 2012).

Attempts have also been made to combine supply-side and demand-side theories. For example, Lawson and Cragun (2012) studied the growth of Mormonism, Adventism, and Jehovah's Witnesses in several countries and concluded that the growth rates of the



different religions were responding to both demand-side and supply-side factors. Other researchers have attempted to explain religious behavior using different economic theories. For example, McBride (2007) posited that an economic theory of how clubs work might be beneficial in explaining the religious participation of Mormons. His paper argues that the Church offers a menu of “club goods” that require varying levels of religious participation to obtain.

Underlying all these theories, however, is the premise that individuals participate in religious behavior because they believe that the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs. Essentially all of these theories are derivatives of rational choice theory and are borrowed from the field of economics.

### **The Need for an Alternative**

The limitations of rational choice theory in explaining religious behavior are too great to ignore because they make generalizations across different groups and perhaps even individuals impossible. In order to determine whether religious participation is a rational choice, the value of costs and benefits of religious participation from the perspective of the individual making that choice must be known. This is almost impossible to discover, since individuals determine these costs and benefits differently according to their individual level of belief and what belief system they adhere to. Attempts to generalize using rational choice theory result in very imprecise predictions.

Since the perceived costs and benefits to religious participation are subjective and are usually not quantifiable, the best way to determine what the costs and benefits are is to use qualitative research methods. Qualitative research methods allow researchers to obtain a description of the subjective perceptions of individuals. Consequently,

qualitative methods are more suited to studying a question as personal and subjective as why someone decides to participate in a religious organization.

### **Research Question**

Consequently, I studied why religiously active Latter-day Saint immigrants to the United States participate in the religion and what they perceive as the costs and benefits of religious participation. The goal of this study is largely to determine if something resembling rational choice theory arises when the theory is derived from the participants themselves. Essentially, this study used grounded theory methods to describe why individuals participate in the Church of Jesus Christ and compared the resulting theory to rational choice theory to determine if the two are reconcilable.

Another important goal of this study is to determine how social workers and others who interact with individuals like these religious immigrants can better mobilize resources available in their clients' congregations to better meet their needs. This dissertation essentially views the religious beliefs and participation of immigrants as a potential resource that may be useful for individuals trying to overcome problems in their lives. By focusing on immigrant members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the literature suggests that should have been able to observe a greater breadth of both religious costs and benefits than if I were to study non-immigrants or individuals from a religion that isn't quite as strict.

## **Chapter 4: Methods**

### **Overview**

Data consisted of semi-structured qualitative interviews with practicing Latter-day Saint immigrants to the United States. An interview guide was created based on a review of literature, personal expertise from my involvement in and research on the LDS Church, and feedback from a small pilot study (n=3). The interview guide is attached to this dissertation as an appendix. IRB approval was obtained through the University of Pennsylvania before any data were collected for inclusion in the dissertation.

### **Sampling and Eligibility**

The goal of the sampling was to collect a wide range of religiously active immigrant Mormon perspectives. To accomplish this, I used a combination of theoretical and purposive sampling (Higginbottom, 2004). I sampled in two regions: Utah and the Philadelphia area (Southeastern Pennsylvania/Western New Jersey). These two sites were chosen in order to compare participants from an area where Latter-day Saints are a minority religion (the Philadelphia area) with Latter-day Saints from an area where they are in the majority (Utah). The Philadelphia area and Utah have also both been described as new immigrant destinations, and consequently are likely to have fewer developed institutions that cater to the needs of immigrants when compared with areas with a longer history of immigration (Riosmena & Massey, 2012; Shihadeh & Winters, 2010; Smith & Mannon, 2010).

The Migration Policy Institute (2013) reports that, in Utah, 8.4% of the overall population is comprised of immigrants. Immigrants to Utah come primarily from Latin America (61.5%, 44% from Mexico) and to a lesser extent from Asia (16.7%), Europe

(11.5%), Canada (4%), Oceania (3.7%), and Africa (2.7%). About 36% of immigrants to Utah are naturalized citizens. In Pennsylvania, 5.9% of the overall population is comprised of immigrants. Immigrants to Pennsylvania come from Asia (37.5%), Latin America (29.5%), Europe (24.1%), and to a lesser extent Africa (6.4%), Canada (2.1%), and Oceania (0.4%). Slightly over half (52.3%) of the immigrants in Pennsylvania are naturalized citizens.

Within each region I sampled at least two respondents from each of the following categories: female, male, adult convert, lifelong member or childhood convert, participating in an English language congregation, and participating in a non-English language congregation. Since individuals may fulfill more than one category (e.g. a female respondent could also be an adult convert and attend a non-English language congregation), the absolute minimum sample size this strategy allows would be eight (four from each region). However, I continued to sample until I reach a saturation point, i.e. no new types of benefits or costs to religious participation are being mentioned (see Bowen, 2008). The number I eventually sampled was 12, four from Utah and eight from Pennsylvania or New Jersey.

Purposive sampling began with my personal contacts in the Latter-day Saint community and additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling. As a lifelong, active member of the Latter-day Saint community, I personally know hundreds of Latter-day Saints both in Utah and the Philadelphia area. If my personal contacts and their referrals were not sufficient, I contacted additional participants using information for Latter-day Saint clergy found via a public website operated by the Church ([maps.lds.org](http://maps.lds.org)).

I also attempted to meet additional contacts by attending foreign language congregations. I ended up attending three Spanish-speaking congregations (two in Utah and one in New Jersey) and one Samoan-speaking congregation (in Utah). While this strategy helped me find people to interview in the Pennsylvania/New Jersey region, it did not work very well in Utah. The members of the Church of Jesus Christ in New Jersey were automatically more open to the idea of doing an interview with me simply because I was another member of their faith. However, simply being a member of the same religion did not generate the same instant rapport in Utah. Although I was able to make appointments for several interviews with people I met attending foreign-language congregations, only one person actually showed up for their scheduled interview.

My impression is that it was more difficult to make contacts that resulted in interviews in Utah for two reasons. The first is that, outside of Utah, Mormons are a minority group and consequently the shared experience of being a minority creates more of a feeling of connection. The second is that immigrants in Utah, at least the ones that I spoke with, were more likely to be undocumented and consequently worried more about speaking with individuals they did not know.

In the final sample, nine of the respondents came from references from personal contacts or were personally known to me. Two respondents came from contacts I made from attending a Spanish language unit in the Philadelphia/Camden area. The final contact was made using a combination of the two methods. I attended a Spanish language unit in Utah with someone I knew who regularly attended there. After my friend introduced me to other people in the congregation, I was able to set up a few

appointments for interviews. One of these appointments eventually resulted in an interview.

During the initial contact with potential respondents, they were screened to determine if they are eligible to participate. Eligibility criteria were based on the goal to interview religiously active Latter-day Saint immigrants. This study defined “religiously active” as attending Church services at least once a month, regardless of whether or not the individual complies with other behavioral norms in the Latter-day Saint community. Individuals were considered eligible for the study if they: (1) were 18 years old or older, (2) self-identified as a baptized member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, (3) reported that they attend religious services at least once a month, (4) were fluent in either English or Spanish, (5) were living in the United States at the time of the interview (one participant has since returned to live in Mexico), and (6) were able to give informed consent.

Based on recommendations from the dissertation committee received during my dissertation proposal defense, I also included a few interviews of individuals who were currently not attending church or who had experienced extended periods of time after their conversion in which they had not attended Church services. This presented a challenge, as individuals who are not participating in the Church who are willing to be interviewed are much more difficult to find. This is because they have fewer social connections with active members who are attending Church services, so snowball sampling is less effective, and because they seem to be less enthusiastic to talk about their experiences with the Church. At least one sample of less active Mormons showed that many of them attribute their lack of participation on negative interactions with practicing

members and Church leaders (Albrecht et al., 1982), which may contribute to this hesitancy to speak about their experiences.

### **Procedure and Instrumentation**

Semi-structured interviews took place at a site that was agreed on by both the interviewer and the participant. Some interviews took place in the homes while others took place in public places (including a church classroom, a public library, and a university student union building). All of the interviews took place with close family members of the interviewees nearby, with the exception of a couple of the men. Because of this, several of the respondents used the plural personal pronoun “we” instead of “I” when answering questions. The “we” almost always referred to the individual respondent and their spouse. Two of the respondents were married to each other and wanted to be interviewed together, at the same time.

Consistent with my experiences in the Latter-day Saint culture, all of the women interviewed chose to be interviewed in locations that were within earshot of a close family member (usually their husband if they were married). Three wanted to be interviewed with their husband in the room. While not explicitly discussed with the interviewees, in my experience this behavior is common in Mormon culture. Unrelated individuals of the opposite sex rarely are alone together except for a few limited circumstances and attempts are usually made to make interactions with non-related individuals of the opposite sex transparent to the spouses of those involved.

An interview guide had been designed based on a literature review of various benefits of religious participation, my knowledge from studying Latter-day Saints, and feedback from pilot research I have conducted with Latter-day Saints. Stolz’s (2008)

typology of religious goods was interpreted in the context of Latter-day Saints to create the interview protocol. To give the interview guide structure, the questions were designed to revolve around different areas of life (spiritual, financial, etc.). Pilot research led to the rewording of a few questions and also prompted me to include a prompt to discuss discrimination experienced as a result of participating in the church. The actual interviews did not adhere strictly to the interview guide.

The semi-structured interviews covered the benefits and costs to religious participation for a variety of areas of the participant's life including spirituality, social, educational, financial, emotional, physical, cultural, in their family life, and (if applicable), their experiences as an immigrant, a convert, or a lifelong member. The interview protocol had been designed in a way to maximize the trustworthiness of the data resulting from the interviews. In order to better elicit participants' subjective experiences and avoid introducing specific interpretations of costs and benefits, questions at the beginning of the interview were broad and gradually become more specific. This made the data at the beginning of the interview less influenced by researcher questions and therefore more representative of the respondent's subjective understanding. Also, after asking a broad question about the impact of religious participation on a specific area of the respondent's life, questions were asked during each section seeking out both negative aspects of participation in the church (costs) as well as benefits.

Specifically asking for negative information was important in order to counter the possible tendency of practicing members of a religion to portray their religious participation as a universally positive experience. Several respondents initially reported that there were no drawbacks or costs to participating in the Church. These respondents



were prompted about different areas of their lives and specifically asked about how participation may have negatively impacted that aspect of their life.

The interviews ranged in duration from 40 minutes to two hours. Most of the actual interviews lasted less than an hour. Respondents were asked to define and clarify ambiguous terminology during the interviews. Consistent with snowball sampling methods, participants were also asked to recommend other eligible individuals who they believe might be willing to participate.

### **Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed and transcripts were analyzed to identify what participants identified as the benefits and costs of religious participation. A priori codes that were used in analyzing the data included religious benefits and costs in different aspects of the participant's lives (spiritual, social, educational, financial, emotional, physical, and cultural). To evaluate the trustworthiness of the data, special attention was paid to emic and etic language ("emic" refers to terms introduced by participants whereas "etic" refers to terms introduced by the interviewer or researcher) used in the interview. I use the term "trustworthiness" instead of "validity" because validity as it has been traditionally defined in science is more applicable to quantitative than qualitative research methods (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992). Since the goal of the research is to understand the subjective experience of the participant, themes that originate from terms introduced by the researcher were considered less trustworthy than themes originating from terms introduced by the participant.

In addition, codes that emerge from the data (i.e. not a priori codes) were also used. These codes were identified through a process explained by Goulding (2005). The

transcripts were read for understanding, during a rereading of the transcripts significant statements were extracted, and related statements across interviews were grouped into themes. These themes were used to create a description of what participants view as benefits and costs of religious participation.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study that should be noted. First of all, the findings from this study should not be viewed as generalizable to immigrants, Mormons, or even Mormon immigrants beyond these respondents. Second, while I attempted to gain a rich understanding of the experiences of these immigrants, language barriers made it difficult (and in many cases impossible) to convey these individuals' experiences accurately. A third possible limitation is that respondents have a tendency to give socially desirable responses, especially during one-on-one interviews with an individual that they know personally. There is some evidence that this occurred in at least a couple of the interviews that took place in this study. A fourth limitation is that, since many of my questions had to deal with events that happened in the respondents' life, the fallibility of human memory and the tendency of people to reinterpret their past in light of present situations is a potential threat to the trustworthiness of my findings. I will elaborate on each of these limitations below.

Regarding the first limitation mentioned, the study design prevented me from generalizing these findings. One of the main goals of science in general is to discover information that can be generalized to a broader population. However, because the sample for this study was not randomly selected and is so small, the findings for this study cannot be reliably generalized to any broader population. If it were feasible to do

in-depth interviews with a large enough number of randomly-selected Mormon immigrants, then the findings of that study would be more generalizable. However, that study would not have been feasible given resource constraints. The best study is always one that is possible to carry out, and this study can give us insight on the experiences of the individuals involved and inform future research on this topic.

The second limitation is that while qualitative methods are best suited to attempting to discover why individuals participate in religion, even they are inadequate to accurately convey how people feel about their experiences. Language limits our ability to describe experience –especially religious experiences- and forces individuals to use imprecise metaphors and analogies. Many of the individuals in this study describe experiences that are very difficult to put into words: abuse, fleeing war zones, spiritual experiences, and family conflict. For some of these individuals, English is their second language which makes accurately expressing their thoughts even more difficult. To partly address the language issue, participants who spoke Spanish were given the option of doing the interview in Spanish. In those cases, all of the analyses were performed before translating relevant portions of the Spanish-language interviews into English to be included as quotes in this document.

The third possible limitation is that respondents may give socially desirable responses. The sample for this study was not random and several of the respondents knew me personally or we had a common social connection. Even though respondents were reassured that their responses would be kept confidential and not shared with any identifying information attached to them, it is difficult to give socially undesirable responses in a one-on-one interview. Also, most respondents wanted to be interviewed

within earshot of family members and may have been hesitant to share any information that may reflect badly on their family. I considered this to be an acceptable risk in order to obtain in-depth information from this group. It is improbable that I would have been able to obtain the same level of information using a research method less susceptible to social desirability; or that respondents would have been comfortable being interviewed if I had insisted that other people not be present during the interview.

Due to the fact that several of my questions dealt with the past experiences of respondents, auto-biographical revision is another important limitation to this study. People change the narratives of their life over the course of time. So, if I were to ask what role someone's religious beliefs played in their immigration to the United States every five years over the course of 40 years, the answers I would receive would be slightly different each time. Our present circumstances and our memory necessarily influence our interpretation of the past. Consequently, any findings I present that deal with narratives of the past should not be viewed as precise descriptions of past events, but rather as insight in how the respondent currently interprets their past.

## **Chapter 5: Findings**

### **Overview**

This section is divided into five broad sections. First, I will describe the characteristics of the sample. Second, I will present how participants described why they participated in the Church of Jesus Christ. Third, I will talk about what participants described as benefits to participation. Fourth, I will describe what the participants described as the drawbacks of participation in the Church. Fifth and finally, I will describe how the participants negotiated the conflicts that arose between the costs and benefits of religious participation.

Three of the interviews were originally conducted in Spanish. When I quote from these interviews, I will translate them into English and note that the quote has been translated by following the quote with the short parenthetical phrase: (my translation). If any names are mentioned in the quote I will replace them with a letter (e.g. Mr. A, Sister B, etc.).

### **Sample Description**

The final sample consisted of 12 different respondents. By design, my study sample was a diverse group in terms of location of residence, gender, English language abilities, tenure participating in the Church, and other traits. First, I will discuss the basic demographics of my sample. Second, I will discuss their immigration history. Third, I will talk about their history with the Church of Jesus Christ. Table 1 contains some information about each of the twelve respondents as well as pseudonyms by which they will be referred to throughout the dissertation.

Table 1: Participant pseudonyms and information

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Country of birth</b>	<b>Tenure in the USA</b>	<b>Tenure in the Church*</b>
Miranda	Philadelphia/ Camden	Saudi Arabia	10 years	24 years
Vokel	Philadelphia/ Camden	Liberia	8 years	23 years
Gloria	Philadelphia/ Camden	Paraguay	24 years	26 years
Amy	Philadelphia/ Camden	Sierra Leon	5 years	6 months
Pablo	Philadelphia/ Camden	Paraguay	24 years	31 years
Louisa	Philadelphia/ Camden	Paraguay	24 years	24 years
Jose	Philadelphia/ Camden	Nicaragua	14 years	19 years
Miledi	Philadelphia/ Camden	Guatemala	20 years	34 years
Mariela	Utah	Mexico	8 months	28 years
Eraida	Utah	Argentina	29 years	35 years
Johan	Utah	Mexico	30 years	10 years
Marcelino	Utah	Peru	5 years	3 years

\*Note: Tenure in the Church is calculated from an individuals' age at baptism for converts or simply a person's age for lifelong members. Individuals are officially counted on the records of the Church when they are baptized or at the time they receive a "baby's blessing" shortly after birth. Usually the only individuals who receive baby blessings are those who are born to Mormon parents. Baptism for lifelong members takes place when they are eight years old.

By design, the twelve respondents were a fairly diverse group demographically.

Seven of the interviewees were female and the remaining five were male. None of the

respondents self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Of the twelve respondents, one had never been married, three were divorced or separated from their spouse, and the remaining eight were currently married. Four of those who were married were married to native born American citizens. The respondents ranged in age from their mid-20's to their late-50's.

Seven of the interviews were conducted in English, three were conducted entirely in Spanish, and the remaining two were conducted in Spanglish. One of the Spanglish interviews was conducted because Johan did not want his Spanish-speaking mother to understand what he was saying, but he lacked the ability to communicate exclusively in English. The other Spanglish interview was conducted because Mariela preferred talking to me in English, but did not have a sufficient vocabulary in English to conduct the interview exclusively in English. Nine of the respondents spoke a language other than English in their home, seven of which spoke Spanish, Vokel spoke Krahn (a Liberian tribal language), and Amy spoke a form of pidgin English from Sierra Leon.

The immigrants originally entered the United States using various methods. Johan entered illegally using a "coyote." Five entered legally using tourist visas and then overstayed their visas. Vokel originally entered the USA legally as a refugee. Amy won a lottery visa. Eraidia entered on a bridal visa. Miranda entered with her family when her mother obtained a work visa. Finally, Mariela entered the USA with her husband, who is a native born citizen, and was applying for permanent residency at the time of the interview. (Her application for permanent residency has since been denied and she has moved back to Mexico with her husband and child. She plans to reapply in a few months.)

The respondents had a diverse immigration history. Of the 12 participants, nine countries of origin are represented: Paraguay, Mexico, Nicaragua, Argentina, Peru, Guatemala, Sierra Leon, Liberia, and Saudi Arabia. Miranda, the immigrant from Saudi Arabia, was from a Filipino family that had moved to Saudi Arabia before eventually immigrating to the United States. The time the respondents had lived in the United States varied from 6 months to more than 30 years. Six of the 12 had spent at least some of their time in the United States as undocumented, and two were undocumented at the time of my interview with them. The age at which they immigrated to the United States varied from 4 years old to 48 years old with four of the 12 respondents having immigrated to the United States as children or teenagers.

The reasons undocumented respondents chose to come to the United States varied. Two overstayed visas because their spouse or girlfriend was in the United States. Marcelino overstayed his tourist visa because his son was living in the United States and he felt that he should be closer to him even though it meant losing a good job in Peru and living in relative poverty here. Pablo simply stated that he came to visit a sister and just “really liked it” here and so he brought his family and they stayed. Two of the undocumented or formerly undocumented respondents were brought to the United States as children by relatives; however Johan came over voluntarily as a teenager. In describing why he chose to come to the United States illegally with his uncle, Johan described his fantasy of living in the United States:

What brought me to the United States was what I think the most common reason that all Hispanic or all the immigrants from other countries are coming here. We seem somehow...mine wasn't because I had nothing to eat or work over there. I



was not poor. The main reason was the curious, the fantasy. All the people who came here before me, they came with the big fantasies, which is not the truth. If you get to the United States you get a car, you get a fancy style, you get fancy clothes, you get a fancy house, beautiful white girls. When I was 16 I looked for a lady, I looked for a girl. And big fantasies about...they make a totally different picture from what is the reality. United States is beautiful; you got a lot of opportunities if you look for it. But you can go the opposite. You can also go on the wrong people, the wrong way, and you don't need success and no reason, no way. It can be bad here or bad over there.

The reasons that individuals immigrated to the United States (with or without documentation) essentially fell into three categories: (1) A hope for a good life in the United States, even if that hope is discovered later to not be grounded in reality. This motivation is represented by the case of the respondent I just quoted. (2) To join family members who are already living in the United States or will be living in the United States. This was the most common reason given. (3) Fleeing a dangerous situation in their country of origin. This is the case of several of my respondents. While only one of them came to the United States as a refugee, others came to avoid violence and kidnapping in Mexico, to escape an abusive home life in their country of origin, or to avoid the threat of violence in Saudi Arabia.

Most of the time there was a combination of push and pull factors at play. For example, Miranda, who emigrated with her family from Saudi Arabia, was a child when she came to the United States and essentially followed her family. But her family left

Saudi Arabia for safety concerns and technically they came to the United States on a work visa after her mother was offered a job.

All of the interviewees eventually chose to settle in either the Philadelphia/Camden area or in Utah, but five had originally immigrated to other locations and later moved. Besides Philadelphia, Camden, and Utah; the original gateway locations included San Jose California, Albany New York, Miami Florida, and Minneapolis Minnesota. While some have since relocated to follow economic or educational opportunities, the vast majority chose where to settle originally because of family or friend connections in the area. However, there were two exceptions. Vokel originally went to Minneapolis through the refugee resettlement program. The refugee settlement program requires refugees to be sponsored by a voluntary agency and consequently refugees end up in the locations where the agency that sponsors them is located. The other exception was Mariela, who immigrated to Utah because she felt that the Church's influence made it a good environment for raising children:

Q: So why did you guys decide to settle in Utah as opposed to anywhere else in the United States?

A: It's because when I was like 18 or something like that...I came over here to see what happens and I liked it a lot. And I told him [her husband] that I really liked it and that it's a good environment for the kids...

Q: By "over here" do you mean Utah or the United States in general?

A: No, Utah. I liked the environment for the kids.

Q: What made you feel like Utah was a good place to raise kids?

A: Over here the Church is more strong than in Mexico and we lived next to the border in a very...it's a lot of dangers. I cannot go alone with the kid to the supermarket because many kids are stolen from their parents. So we don't want to live like that.

The interviewees also had very different histories with regard to their participation in the Church of Jesus Christ. Of the 12 respondents, four were lifelong members and eight were converts to the faith. Of the eight converts, five converted in their twenties and the remaining three were over the age of 30 when they converted. The oldest age of conversion was 53. The amount of time respondents have considered themselves members ranged from about 6 months to about 35 years.

The respondents also varied in terms of their level of participation in the Church. One of the respondents was currently not attending services. An additional four had experienced extended periods of time since their conversion in which they did not participate in the Church but were currently participating. Marcelino periodically stopped attending services for stretches of few weeks to a couple of months because of mental health issues. The remaining six report attending Church services regularly since their conversion.

### **Reasons for Participation**

At some point during each interview I asked the participant why they participate in the Church. In the actual interviews, the timing of this question varied slightly. In some interviews it occurred near the beginning of the interview, before we had discussed the various costs and benefits of participation, and in others it came near the end of the interview. In interpreting the data, the responses that came earlier in the interview should

be considered more trustworthy because they were least likely to be influenced by the previous questions.

The reasons interviewees chose to participate in the Church varied. Five of the 12 participants did not refer to any advantages or benefits that result from their participation in describing why they participate. Three of the respondents pointed to participating because doing so gives them emotional benefits. Two respondents participated because of the promises for the afterlife. The final two respondents participated for various reasons: gratitude, individual betterment, admiration for the organization of the Church, etc.

Five participants simply stated that they participate in the Church because what it teaches is true or because God led them to. Pablo gave a typical response:

Q: So if I asked you why do you choose to participate in the Church, why do you go to church? What is the first thing that comes to your mind?

A: Because I know this is the true Church of Jesus Christ. I know and I have a testimony of it and nobody can change my mind. No Jehovah's Witnesses can come and change my mind (laughter).

Participating in the Church because it is true or because God wants them to, as the respondent just quoted did, was the preferred response of individuals who had experienced periods of not attending Church services. This response was cited by Gloria, the individual who currently did not attend church services, (in her case the question was rephrased to ask why she identified as a member of the Church) and by three of the four respondents who had experienced extended periods of time after their baptism not attending the Church. The one remaining individual who cited this reason as the primary

reason why they participate in the Church was Amy, a recent convert of about six months. She essentially participated in the Church because she felt God wanted her to:

A: So God just led me in the Spirit to go to that church (the LDS Church).

Q: Ok, that's good. So God led you to go to this church. So why do you choose to continue to go to the church?

A: Well, just like I say, the Spirit says go. (laughs)

Participating simply because the Church is true or because God wants them to is also the most trustworthy response. This response was more likely to occur at the beginning of the interview process, before respondents had been primed to think in terms of costs versus benefits.

The second most common reason of why interviewees participated in the Church was that doing so gave them some kind of emotional benefit. The emotions most commonly described include happiness, peace, a sense of hope, and energy. Johan said, "You know what the feeling I get from church is? I came back home full of energy and emotional support, I want to share things. I want everyone to learn what I learned today." Miranda talked about the emotional strength she receives when facing difficult times in life:

I know that the gospel is where you can find peace and happiness and some refuge from whatever bad thing is happening. And it never fails to bring that to you. It's never the way you want or expect it to come but it's always there if you go looking for it.

The third most common reason participants cited were otherworldly benefits, specifically eternal life or salvation. Miledi explained why she participated in the Church

this way: “Because I want to have an eternal life. I want to return to my Heavenly Father” (my translation). Vokel simply responded to the interview question by saying “Salvation. Salvation is.”

Finally, two of the respondents mentioned various reasons when asked why they participated in the Church. These reasons ranged from admiring the structure of the Church, the belief that participating makes them a better person, gratitude for Jesus Christ, love of their family, and the opportunities they have to help others through the Church.

### **Benefits of Participation**

Aside from the discussing the main reasons individuals participated in the Church, the interviews discussed what respondents viewed as specific benefits to participation in the Church. This section will be divided into six sub-sections: immigration and integration, financial benefits, social support, emotional benefits, otherworldly benefits, and other benefits.

#### *Immigration and Integration*

As cited in an earlier chapter reviewing literature on the sociology of immigration, several researchers believe that religious participation can be used by immigrants to facilitate their integration into their destination countries (e.g. Chen, 2008; Connor & Koenig, 2013). Consistent with the previous scholarly work, the immigrants in this study reported several instances in which religion did indeed help them in the immigration process and in integrating into American society. Religion played a part in helping immigrants as they were coming to the United States, helping them integrate, and also helping them financially. While social benefits and financial benefits will be

discussed more in-depth later, they will be touched on in this sub-section as they relate specifically to immigration.

Eight of the 12 respondents converted to the Church in their country of origin before their immigration to the United States. In varying degrees, the Church was involved in the immigration of six of those eight. Of the remaining two, Jose was not participating at all in the Church when he immigrated and Eraidia did not report any Church involvement with her immigration.

The involvement of the Church varied greatly. Miranda, whose family was immigrating from Saudi Arabia a year or so after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, remembers that her family was helped by a recommendation from a fellow member of the Church who was an American diplomat:

It was Brother A. He was a diplomat in the American embassy and we were trying to apply for a visa and we had told him about it and then -I don't remember this part but my parents, my dad, said that- as they were about to start their interview Brother A came in and he said 'So and So this is the family that I was telling you about.' And kind of introduced them. And I'm not sure what else happened there but he got a good recommendation from a friend a diplomat.

The above quote represents the only instance in my interviews where a Mormon employee of the US government helped an individual through the immigration process. Other respondents were able to immigrate to the USA because they or a close family member married an American missionary. Mormons, especially Mormon males, usually serve missions in their late-teens or early 20s. Pablo and Louisa (who were related to each other) were able to immigrate because their sister married someone who had served

a mission in their home country of Paraguay. The former missionary married the sister after he finished his mission and then her siblings immigrated to the USA and settled near the sister in the Philadelphia area. Eraida started receiving letters from a missionary who had formerly served in her area and they started a long distance relationship. Eventually he proposed and she immigrated on a bridal visa:

And then Elder B returned to the United States and then he wrote a letter saying that he really liked me and that he thought I was a nice person and he asked permission to start writing to me. And so I said, “Oh ok.” But I didn’t think anything of it then. Two years later his parents became my guardian and I came up to the United States. Right around 18, just before my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday I got here. So that’s how I arrived to the United States. On a bridal visa. But I came under his parents’ guardianship.

The above quote and the experiences of some of the interviewees highlight the influence of the missionary program of the Church for the lives of Latter-day Saint immigrants. Missionaries form social connections and learn about the cultures of the nations in which they proselytize. The missionary program impacted the lives of respondents in other ways as well, not just in the process of obtaining a visa to immigrate. Miranda, whose family was Filipino, married a native born American who served his mission in the Philippines and reported that it has been helpful for their relationship that her husband understands the culture of the family she grew up in. Mariela reported that, as an immigrant from Mexico attending an English-speaking ward, it helps her feel welcome that many members of the congregation also speak Spanish because they learned it on their missions.



There were six respondents who received help from their participation in the Church of Jesus Christ in immigrating to the United States. One belonged to a family that received a recommendation from a Mormon diplomat when applying for a visa and three were able to immigrate because of the marriage of a non-immigrant Mormon missionary to themselves or a family member. Of the other two respondents, Mariela chose to immigrate to Utah because she felt like the Church's strength there contributed to a good environment to raise children. The other respondent, Vokel, received financial help and opportunities as he was a refugee waiting to come to the United States:

[The Church] did help me when I was in Ghana. Not with the process but as a refugee in African countries as in other developing countries, there are no opportunities for refugees. So I was doing some volunteer work for the Church and so through that the Church missionaries there were giving me a little bit of compensation. In addition to that I used to go to a nearby country, Togo, and bring back some African craft and sell them to the missionaries, the couple missionaries, and that is how I was sustaining myself.

Participation in the Church also helped immigrants integrate after they arrived. According to Berry (1997) "integration" refers to a group maintaining its cultural identity but also becoming part of the dominant culture. Latter-day Saint congregations are organized geographically and, consequently, all members of the Church who live in a specific area go to the same congregation regardless of immigration status. As soon as individuals arrive at a new location, they have a community to support them. Miledi described how the Church helped her this way:

Q: When you immigrated to the United States did it help that you were a member of the Church?

A: I think that it helped because we could come that first Sunday to church and I felt good. I felt like...I had sisters and brothers. Sisters and brothers in the church. Since the congregation was very small, we really were all like one family. (my translation)

When immigrating to Utah and attending an English language congregation, integration is facilitated even further. Mariela, who switched from a Spanish language congregation to a “regular” English language congregation, talked about how participating in the Church let her meet all of her neighbors, “I didn’t know anyone except for the people who live upstairs, but when I start going to the regular ward I met all my neighbors.” A little later in the interview, this same respondent discussed how, despite attending an English language ward, she is still confident that she can keep her Mexican culture:

Q: Do you think that being a member of the Church in an English speaking ward will make it harder to keep your Mexican culture?

A: I think it doesn’t effect it. Everyone accepts us as Mexicans and it looks like people like that we are Mexicans.

Q: Why do you say that “it looks like people like that we are Mexicans”?

A: Because some people that can say some words or something in Spanish, they try to speak Spanish to us. I don’t know, they are very kind with us.

However, in many instances, aspects of the immigrant’s original national culture were not maintained and it was replaced by a “Mormon” culture. In Berry’s typology this

is known as assimilation (1997). This was not necessarily tied to immigration and sometimes this happened to immigrants while they were still in their nation of origin. This will be discussed more in depth later in the findings chapter.

### *Financial Benefits*

Religious organizations provide social welfare services formally through programs as well as informally through social connections made through the congregation (Cnaan et al., 2006). Both of these approaches to welfare service provision, informal and formal, were evident in the interviews I conducted. In addition, several respondents felt that they received financial blessings from God from paying tithing.

Formal help received from the Church varied widely. Some examples cited by respondents included educational programs, help with utility payments, help with rent payments, and food. The most common forms of formal assistance were rent payments or food. The Church operates “bishop’s storehouses” around the United States which are essentially grocery stores in which all of the items are given out for free when an individual arrives with a food order from their local clergy member. Of the seven respondents who had received formal welfare assistance from the Church, most reported that the assistance consisted in occasional assistance just to help them for a short period of time. For Jose, this consisted of just \$50 to help them pay a week of rent:

I had rented a room of an apartment for \$50 a week and didn’t have a week’s worth of rent and the Church paid for a week or two. Perhaps that is the only thing I’ve received from the Church” (my translation).

On the other hand, Johan reported receiving a lot of help over the course of years. He reported:

I've been stuck on my rent when I was in California. Over here somehow I would pay \$425 for the rent on the land [for a mobile home]. But over there we had to pay \$1400 or \$1450. They [the Church] were giving me help for years. And they were giving me food orders. And some clothes. And whoever I called, I'd say, "I'm stuck over here, can you do things?" and right away they would come and help. When I had to move from one place to another in California. It was only me, my ex-wife, and my little girl. I just had to say in elders' quorum<sup>1</sup>, "I'm moving this coming week on this day and I need a couple of hands." Last time I moved we started packing some stuff. Me and my ex-wife. And we stopped and people came ready to carry stuff. We had some bits of trash and they just came and ok. Seven brothers who said, "We're ready to help you." They had parked a couple of trucks outside. And they emptied my place in no time and took it to the new place. We wanted to put down some more garbage, "Hey bring me the garbage bag." "Where are they?" "Right there." Nothing. They also had taken the trash! They didn't know it was the trash, they just started grabbing bags and bags. They helped me more than once. I've been helped a lot. I don't know how I survived so many years without knowing the Church.

At least a couple of individuals underreported or did not report formal assistance they have received from the Church. While I was conducting some of these interviews, I was also a financial clerk for a congregation to which some of these respondents belonged. One of my responsibilities included generating welfare checks for the

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<sup>1</sup> The elders quorum refers to a group for males in the Church. There are two groups for adult Mormon males in most Latter-day Saint congregations: the elders quorum and the high priests group. Collectively these two groups are known as a "Melchizedek Priesthood quorums."

congregation. Because of my insider status, I know that at least one individual who did receive formal financial help from the Church did not report it and others tended to minimize the help they received in their responses. It is possible that these individuals did not remember receiving financial help from the Church or they felt the need to conceal the information, but either way it presents a limitation to my findings on this subject.

Many respondents also received substantial informal benefits. These benefits included help with child care, help moving, discounted dental care, a car, employment, meals, social support, education, and other things. Vokel reported getting a car to help him become more employable:

A bishop invited me to a dinner just two or three weeks after I got here, and he and myself were discussing about how am I gonna get a job. And during the discussion transportation was one of the challenges that I had and the bishop was like, “Oh, we have one sister here who has an old car that wants to give it to another member of the Church.” He called the sister right away and the sister said, “Let C come and pick it up.” And I came back tomorrow. That’s how I got my first car.

However, the most common informal benefits mentioned were help getting employment, child care, help moving, and meals. Mariela gave a typical response:

We feel like if we need something, I can call someone to help me. Because when he [the respondent’s husband] was sick that month, a lot of sisters came and brought us food and asking if everything is ok. D and E helped us to babysit F when he was in the hospital.

Sometimes the informal help came in the form of education on topics that allowed the respondents to save money or budget more effectively. Miledi did not report receiving any formal monetary or in-kind aid from the Church, but does report learning skills that helped her live more economically:

When my kids were little, I had a magnificent Relief Society<sup>2</sup> President and she taught us how to be very self-sufficient: To have food storage, to sew, to cut hair, to bake, to buy food in a way that was more economical, and all of those sorts of things. So I put that into practice and saved a lot of money. (my translation)

Several respondents also mentioned receiving blessings from God from the payment of tithing. Miranda put it this way, “Whenever we keep paying our tithes money will come in somehow. Blessings.” Even Gloria, who did not pay tithing, believed that she was possibly missing out on blessings by not paying it.

I haven’t paid tithing since I was living here with my parents, but I always felt that when I was paying my tithing I always had an abundance of money. I never ran out. Everything seemed to like always work out. Everything seemed, like if I pay I’m not going to have enough but my money would always last. But I have definitely seen like we’ve struggled financially a few times. And I always think that if we had been paying our tithing things would have worked out differently. Yet we haven’t paid tithing in a long time.

These quotes demonstrate four sources of financial benefits received by participants. The first, exemplified by the financial help in paying rent, is aid through the formal Church welfare system. The second, exemplified by the help moving or the help

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<sup>2</sup> The Relief Society is an organization for adult women in the Church.

with meals and babysitting, is informal aid provided through social contacts made in the Church. The third, exemplified by the comment about a Relief Society president teaching the respondent skills to live more economically, is education. And the fourth, exemplified by the comments on tithing, is divine aid that many of these individuals felt that they received when they obeyed Church teachings.

### *Social Support*

As seen by a few of the quotes in the previous sub-section, respondents often received benefits from social connections in the Church that had direct financial value. In addition to that type of social support, many respondents indicated that participating in the Church made it easier for them to make friends who are long lasting and who share similar values. The Church provides a ready-made social network. Miranda said:

Yeah, but with the Church I feel like no matter where I go I can find a friend because I have the Church. So, in those terms I feel like I am always part of something. Especially with the Relief Society. ‘Cause that’s where you meet women and you see who is close to you and stuff like that. So I feel like that has opened doors to friendships that I normally wouldn’t have if I wasn’t in the Church. ‘Cause I always run into moms in the park who say things like “oh I just moved here, I don’t know anyone.” And so I’m always glad that I moved here and that I can go to the Church and I know that I can have a friend. And even if I do see them once a week and every now and then with activities, it’s so easy and comfortable. These are my sisters, these are my friends!

For many respondents, membership in the Church superseded ethnic or racial barriers to creating friendships, showing that they have successfully assimilated into the

Church's culture. Amy mentioned, "They [members of the Church] don't choose like, because you are black I'm not gonna choose you, or I'm not gonna talk to you.

Everybody will be like unity, one family in the Church." Johan, who is an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, shared a similar viewpoint. Talking about discrimination he said:

I don't see that in the Church. They don't distinguish by colors or sizes. That is one thing I like about the Church, the LDS. There can be a really dark person come over there and enjoy and partake of the sacrament and they are happy to have them. And that's what I love of the Church. Some big catastrophe happens in Asia or Mexico or what have you and the Church takes a lot of stuff over there. They really feel to help people.

It is clear that many of these practicing members felt that participation in the Church provided them with a network of friends even if they did not belong to the same racial or ethnic group. Despite this feeling among some respondents, other respondents did report experiencing discrimination and social conflict in the Church. Their accounts will be discussed in a later section as a cost to participation.

### *Emotional Benefits*

Many respondents reported that participation in the Church made them happy, gave them a feeling of peace, gave them hope, or made them more enthusiastic about life. One respondent phrased it succinctly, "I am a member of the Church because it makes me happy. It gives me hope." Respondents reported that these emotions came from following or believing in the teachings of the Church. The Church's teachings helped several of the respondents to cope with difficult experiences in their lives. For example, Vokel was a



refugee from Liberia's second civil war. He had lost his faith in humanity's ability to solve the world's problems, but the teachings of the Church gave him hope that eventually God would be able to solve the world's problems and he would be able to be a part of that solution:

You know I've come to know that politics, science, and everything in the world cannot solve the world's problems. I think problems in the world today have become so complex, beyond human understanding. I feel that the issues are so far ahead of us. We just choose to ask ourselves, "why these things are happening?" But I know at the end when Jesus Christ will become King of the World we'll get to understand everything. And I want to be a part of that. You know I want to be in His kingdom when He is ruling. I want to be a participant in that. I feel that there is a lot of evil in the world. I'm looking up to the day when they put away totally all power of evil. Yeah. Where the good totally overpowers the evil.

The problems that the Church's teachings helped individuals cope with ranged widely and included histories of being abused, financial difficulties, discrimination, social isolation, health problems, and others. Many respondents used religious activities to cope with everyday difficulties in life. For example, Miranda, a lifelong member, prayed and read scriptures when she faced rough times in her life:

It definitely helps me that when things get rough I know that I can pray or read my scriptures. And I know by doing those things I have more strength to go through more of it the next day. It's like a nice, breathe air moment to be able to sit down and read your scriptures and find strength in that and be able to pray and

kind of pour out your spirit and frustrations to someone who does understand it and can help you.

Another respondent, Eraida, talked about how her love of the Church helped her cope with an abusive stepfather:

I had a lot of things in my childhood that were bad and I had with my stepfather. I had the worst part than my half-sister. And I noticed how my sister has had a hard time really forgiving our stepfather for things that he has done and things that he didn't do. And she kept asking me, "Why do you do so much for him when he was so cruel to you and to mom?" And I will just say that I cannot be another way. That I can...I don't know. She would do things for him but she would do it because maybe I asked her to do it and not because she felt like doing it. And I noticed that for me I just loved him. And then I started thinking, not too long ago, "Why do I feel this way?" For someone who was cruel, and mean and all those things. And I asked myself, "What has this man ever done for you?" I did not realize until this December when he had passed away that he had given me the greatest gift that no one else had given me. And that was that he -one day out of his weird thinking- he showed up at home and said, "We have to go and get baptized in this church." And it was the LDS Church. And I did not know that until December. I just never realized that thanks to him I am now a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. So it was really interesting to me to feel that. It was like Heavenly Father had tied a cute little bow in my life and in my relationship with my stepfather. And that was something incredible. I had

forgiven him but until December it wasn't something more than forgiving. It's almost like Heavenly Father helped me forget my childhood. The bad things.

It's clear from these quotes that the respondents received various emotional benefits from participating in the Church. These benefits included hope, an ability to cope with difficulties through religious behaviors, and forgiveness and the ability to see positives even in the face of very negative relationships.

### *Otherworldly Benefits*

The benefits most commonly associated with religion are otherworldly benefits. The otherworldly benefits mentioned by participants in this study included salvation, the opportunity to live with God, the opportunity to live with their family in the eternities, and a relationship with God. Latter-day Saints believe that families can be together in the eternities through a religious ordinance known as "sealing." This doctrine was cited as helpful for a few of our respondents, including Mariela who supplied this answer when asked near the end of the interview if there were any other benefits to participating in the Church that she wanted to discuss:

To be sealed in the temple with my family. Because I miss my family. They are in Mexico. And I think that it helps that if something happens to someone in my family I know that I'm going to see them later.

Vokel offered this comment when asked what the most important benefit participating in the Church is to him:

Salvation. Salvation is. All the other things are other things, but salvation and to know Jesus Christ personally. I want to know Him, know how He feels, the world –how He feels. The principles He teaches and how I can be better.

This last quote adds cultivating a relationship with the divine to our list of otherworldly benefits. “Knowing Jesus Christ” or getting closer to God was considered a positive result of participating in the Church for many of the respondents.

While a beneficial situation in the afterlife is clearly something that would be considered to be an otherworldly benefit, other benefits were not clearly “otherworldly” or “this worldly.” For example, the belief that paying tithing will result in divine intervention on one’s behalf could be construed as either otherworldly or as a financial benefit, depending on whether the person making the judgment actually believes that cultivating divine favor actually has benefits in this world. For ambiguous cases like this, I chose to classify the benefit under whatever the respondent believed it to be. If a respondent seemed to believe that something was a benefit in both a “this worldly” and “otherworldly” sense, I generally only report the benefit in its “this worldly” version.

#### *Other Benefits*

Several other benefits were also mentioned by participants. These benefits included health benefits, helping families function better, and the motivation the Church gives individuals to improve themselves.

Health benefits came to participants by either following the Church’s health code or through divine intervention. For example, several participants gave up smoking, drinking alcohol, or drug use when they joined the Church. Pablo said when asked how participating in the Church impacted his health, “The Church put me at a very high level because before I used to smoke and I used to drink a lot. And after I got baptized I got rid of all those habits. I’ve been clean since.” Others reported receiving divine help with

medical issues. For example, Gloria talked about how prayer helped her become pregnant after having endometrial cancer.

I had gone in and had an exam at my doctor's office and they told me that I had endometrial cancer. And I didn't have my mom here -my mom was in South America for my grandfather's funeral- and the doctor told me that after the radiation I probably would not be able to have kids. So we prepared ourselves for adoption being really the only way for us. And I just started praying harder and harder that this wouldn't be the end for our family that we would be able to have kids. And I've always dreamt about it and I knew that it was something that I wanted so bad. We got the blessing that we were asking for. So I definitely think that the prayers helped me and it got me through something that even the doctors couldn't understand how I was able to get pregnant. And then my son came along and it just seems like everything has worked out great.

Another benefit that participants mentioned was that the Church helped their families become better. Since the Church emphasizes family life so much, many participants reported trying harder to work out problems and to make themselves better family members. For example, Miranda talked about how the Church's teachings motivated her family to come together to try to process family conflict when it occurred:

No matter what fight we got into, no matter how ugly it was, if it took months, you know we always would take those little steps to make it work because we all want to be a family. And I feel like we got that feeling because we are members of the Church. And I think that if we weren't members, because the Church emphasizes so much on family, and I think the Filipino culture as well is very

much focused on family. So I think that without the Church we would be everywhere. We probably wouldn't be talking to each other. But because we have that tie, even though not all of us are necessarily doing the right things all the time, it still keeps us together wanting to work at it and still be a family and doing that.

For many respondents, they felt like the teachings of the Church helped them avoid repeating problems seen in their families of origin. Miledi reported,

I come from a culture or, it could be said, a tradition of bad feelings like rancor, spitefulness, bad words, and a lack of respect for one's spouse. I was afraid that those things would come up in my life. I feel like the gospel has protected me from all of that. (my translation).

Finally, many of the respondents mention how participating in the Church motivated them to be better people in a variety of areas in their life. Pablo gave a typical response:

The Church changed my life as an individual...if I say 360 degrees I'm going to go back to the beginning, so 180 degrees. It's completely changed. It's made me a better person, a better husband, a better father, a better son, in every way.

Respondents felt that this was due to the teachings of the Church as well as an organizational structure that requires members to do things. Marcelino put it this way:

In the Church, because of its orderliness and the way it is organized. The Church forces Hispanics to begin to learn to become orderly. We need to be orderly, we need to be responsible, we need to be punctual, we need to carry out the ordinances that the Church asks us to do. And that is hard for a lot of Hispanics.

But thank God Daniel that with time we Hispanics begin to live this order. That's why I don't believe that the Church makes life more difficult. To the contrary. I would say that the Church, in addition to enlarging our spirits through the doctrine, teaches us to have a better life. (my translation)

### **Costs of Participation**

Since this study targeted practicing members of the Church of Jesus Christ, it should not be very surprising that all of the respondents had an overall positive image of the Church. However, participating in the Church did make some areas of life more burdensome for respondents. By far the most common and burdensome problems faced by these respondents were social strain and conflict resulting from their participation in the Church. While these respondents also spoke of other difficulties arising from participating in the Church, these difficulties were usually framed in terms of benefits that they felt eventually arose from them (e.g. I pay tithing, but it is not burdensome because God blesses me for it).

However, the social strain and conflict resulting from participating in the Church was real and took many forms. These forms included exposure to discrimination, conflict with family members who were not practicing members of the Church, and the difficulty of establishing relationships with people who are not members of the Church. After discussing these social burdens, this section will cover the other burdens mentioned by participants.

#### *Exposure to Discrimination*

Participating in the Church exposed participants to different kinds of discrimination. Not all of this discrimination had to do with being an immigrant or being

from a particular racial or ethnic group. To make this section easier to follow I organized it by the source of discrimination; i.e whether the discrimination came from other members of the Church or from people who were not members of the Church.

Discrimination coming from other Church members was motivated by the (1) individual respondents' race, (2) ethnicity or national origin, (3) the time they have lived in the USA, (4) whether they were from Utah or not, or (5) because they aren't following Church teachings as much as other members. Alternatively discrimination could come from individuals who are not practicing members of the Church and be due to race, ethnicity, immigration status, time they have lived in the USA, or religious practices/identity. Only the last category, religious practices/identity, has to do with participating in the Church. First I will give examples of discrimination from other Church members and then I will give examples of discrimination from individuals who are not Church members based on religious practices/identity.

Vokel and possibly Marcelino were the only respondents who talked about discrimination in the Church based on race. Vokel reported having difficulty learning that the Church had not allowed men of black African decent to be ordained to the priesthood until 1978 and felt that there were some instances in which other members treated him differently because he was black:

The first negative impression that I have about the Church was the blacks were not given the priesthood until 1978. Personally I began to ask myself... Because the reason was a certain family in The Book of Mormon were disobedient to God and their skin was darkened. I began to ask myself, "If that only happened on the American continent, why black people in other locations of the world namely



Africa and other places, especially Africa? Why are they not being given the opportunity to be given the priesthood right at that time? It only happened to a certain family in America.” So for me, when I joined the Church, at first it took me time to get comfortable with that. The other thing that I experienced is from other Church members when I came to America. I had an experience of sitting with one or two Church leaders and in their interaction with me I felt I was not respected, and I think if it happened to a white person the approach would be different.

Marcelino also spoke about discrimination he experienced from other members of the Church. However, the term he used to describe the basis of the discrimination was the Spanish word *raza*. *Raza* is usually translated into English as “race” but the Spanish word has a broader meaning and can encompass the English concepts of ethnicity, national origin, or lineage as well. From the context of the interview, I have chosen to translate the word as “ethnicity” in the case of Marcelino and later on as “nationality” in the case of Jose. Talking about discrimination in the Church, Marcelino said:

Well, yes. I have lived it, I have felt it, and I have had to try and understand those people. Not accept them, but understand them. Because when a person has prejudices against other types of ethnicities, their behavior and attitudes hurt other people. Now, it’s my opinion that when I encounter these types of people it is best to ignore them. Because I say to myself, this is my thought “Who knows why these people are trying to make me feel bad? Who knows if they are trying to get me to leave the Church? If I pay attention to them, if I listen to them, maybe I will

help them be successful in pushing me away from the Church.” And so I say to myself, “No, I’m not going to listen to them. I’m ignoring them.” (my translation)

Other respondents talked about discrimination based on ethnicity that they had experienced in the Church. While racial discrimination was based in part on Church policies prior to 1978, ethnic discrimination was viewed as part of society in general and was merely carried over into the Church. For example, when asked about whether her membership in the Church exposed her to more discrimination, Eraida, who was living in Utah, stated:

You know what? It’s interesting because the two people who did that (were unkind to her because she was Hispanic) to me the most, and the ones who did it to my children, they were members. But I just think that when you live in a community where the majority is LDS or Catholic I don’t really say, “Oh she did that because she’s a Mormon.” You know? I think that it’s just they did that because they didn’t know better. I’ll always say, “Oh they had a bad day.” Or whatever. But I don’t think that it’s because I was Mormon.

Similarly, Jose reported that in his Spanish language unit in the Philadelphia/Camden area there are stereotypes based on national origin, but that these prejudices exist outside the Church and that people in the Church are quieter about them.

My realistic observation is that the nationalities as such have their own stereotypes about other nationalities. The Mexicans think this about the Puerto Ricans and the Puerto Ricans think this about the Mexicans. Columbians think this and the Dominicans think that and visa versa. That is how it is in normal life, the daily life outside the Church. When people are among their own kind there

aren't any limits to expressing opinions about other nationalities. Inside the Church similar things happen. The only difference is that it isn't discussed as deliberately. The Mexican thinks this about the Puerto Rican, but doesn't say it or talk about it. And the Puerto Rican thinks something else about the Mexican and visa versa. (my translation)

Mariela also reported experiencing discrimination from other members of the Church, but she felt like it was based on how little time she had been in the United States. When asked if being a member of the Church had exposed her to any sort of discrimination, she responded:

Yeah, from the beginning like I told you we didn't like the Spanish ward, they are very like that. They feel like they are more. They saw you behind the shoulder. Because they have more time than you here and they speak well English. I don't know why, but they feel like "Oh I know everything about here" or something like that.

Some of the respondents discussed prejudices that are unique to living in a religious environment. Eraidia talked about how she felt that Mormons outside of Utah expect more from Mormons from Utah or feel that Mormons from Utah haven't really experienced what it is like to be Mormon in an area where people challenge your beliefs.

I am in this missionary moms meeting. It's like a group of moms that have children who are missionaries. And someone was saying how a lot of missionaries that are from Utah, the other missionaries are giving them a hard time because, "Oh you are from Utah and you are not as good as we are because in Utah you don't get challenged to really have a strong testimony and you Utah Mormons are

weird...” So I don’t know and I started thinking about it and I really don’t think that a Utah Mormon is any different than another Mormon. I think what happens is the others expect more of us because we are in Zion and we have so many temples.

Other respondents felt that members treated them differently because they were not following the teachings of the Church closely. Miranda talked about seeing this prejudice in her family. Gloria, who did not attend Church services, stated:

Because I’m inactive<sup>3</sup>, I find that some people that I used to be friends with that are still active in the Church, if I reach out to them they’ll talk to me but I’m not included. Because I’m not active in the Church.

Other respondents experienced discrimination because of their religious beliefs, practices, or identity from people who were not members of the Church. This was especially common among individuals who joined the Church in their countries of origin and later immigrated to the United States. Many of the respondents reported that family members, friends, or others told them that they were crazy or duped when they joined the Church. Eraida reported experiencing a lot of prejudice against her when she lived in Argentina as she went to a Catholic school:

I even went to Catholic school and the first thing they asked me-my mom had told me “Don’t say it!”-it was, “Are you Catholic?” And I said, “no I’m not.” I was the only LDS girl in the entire school and it was bad. It was like no matter how well I did things they would not give me the credits that I earned. And it was just...I was

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<sup>3</sup> Mormons use the terms “inactive” and “less-active” to refer to people who are on the records of the Church but who do not attend Church services or who are disengaged from the faith. Conversely, an “active” Mormon is one who goes to Church and is engaged in the religion.

just a weirdo. It got to a point where it was really bad. Especially with the mother superior- she was like the director of the school. Because it was all females in the school. And I have scoliosis since I was 11, so I had to wear a brace. And it was very difficult to wear this brace. And I had to remove it to do PE. And I went to the bathroom, I removed it and I left it there and I went to play, you know work with the other teacher. And I came back and I couldn't find my brace. So I had to go now and knock at the mother superior's home and I got chewed out so bad. "Why did you leave it there? You're just a stupid Mormon girl. And you just..." And I was just like "Ok." So it was rough to be a Mormon girl.

While this discrimination sometimes occurred simply for being Mormon, other respondents felt that they experienced discrimination because they acted differently as a result of being Mormon. Mariela described losing friends because she did not want to go out with friends and do things contrary to the teachings of the Church. She also mentioned how her husband lost all of his friends when he converted to the Church:

Q: Have you lost any friends because you are a member of the church?

A: Yeah. Because at the beginning at school or.. basically at school they are my friends. But then they start to say, "Hey lets go to...somewhere" and then I say, "Oh no, I'm ok. I don't want to go." And then they stop saying, "Let's go." And they stop talking to you as much and some things like that. But, actually my husband lost all his friends when he got baptized.

Q: Why was that? Because they didn't want to do the same sort of things?

A: Yeah, they didn't respect that you don't drink or you don't speak in the same way.

### *Family Conflict*

Another major cost from participating in the Church was family conflict. Interestingly, most of the interviewees did not report any family conflict resulting from deciding to immigrate to the United States. In fact immigrating was sometimes even seen as reducing family conflict, as in the case of Eraida who left an abusive family situation in Argentina. Immigrating also reunited families who had been separated, as in the case of Marcelino who came to the USA to be closer to his son who lived here. However, many respondents mentioned family conflict resulting from their decision to convert to or participate in the Church.

Usually, this conflict arose from family members who disapprove of the respondent's decision to convert to the Church or between family members who differ in their commitment to the Church. Johan even chose to do the interview in English, despite his difficulties with the language, because he did not want his Catholic mother to understand him when he talked about why he left the Catholic Church to become a Latter-day Saint. Miledi talked about how her family's treatment of her changed when she converted to the Church:

My parents rejecting me hurt because they made fun of me. And that really hurt. I try not to get into fights because I have a sister who is Evangelical, her husband is a pastor. My father-in-law also makes fun of us. (my translation)

Pablo talked about conflict with his extended family because his family decided to convert to the Church:

Well, my family, yes, we have a big problem. Because we come from a huge, strong Catholic family, very traditional. And my grandparents, they have a farm and my grandfather's birthday was July 25<sup>th</sup> and my grandmother was August 25. So we used to have big parties, two or three hundred people. Just close family. And there was drinking and smoking and everything else and they always had it on Sunday. After we got baptized in the Church they basically pushed us to the side. I have... I talk to them. I think I just ignore some things and I get in between people, but they just won't accept my father and my mother. They just don't want to talk to them.

The potential for family conflict also existed in families where everyone was a member of the Church, but the levels of commitment to the Church's teachings differed. One respondent, Miranda, talked about how pressure to live the Church's teachings caused conflict in her family while she was growing up:

But sometimes I feel like the drawbacks might be because we have an ideal of what we want in the end of this life. We have an ideal of...we're going to be rejoicing and be in heaven and we'll all be together and we're celebrating. But the way that we're going it doesn't feel like we're going to get there. So I think sometimes it's hard because we have that perception of what we want and the other person is not doing it. And I sometimes feel like, "Oh they're judging me because these are the choices I want to make. You're being judgmental and you're not being loving. You're not being like the Savior taught you." But at the same time sometimes you feel like, "Now I'm judging you, but this is what's right. And what you're doing is wrong. I agree with you." But then it comes off as "you are

being closed-minded. Oh you're not trying to understand my perspective." And so, that part, at some point you are always going to be knocking heads with each other because one person wants to live in one way and the other person wants to live another way and says, "Well it wrong." And then everywhere else the whole world is telling you that it's fine. So it gets messy sometimes.

*Difficulty Establishing or Maintaining Relationships with People who are not Members*

Many of the respondents reported having very few, if any, friendships with people who were not members of the Church. This situation can be compared to people living in immigrant communities having few friendships outside of that community. The process of shifting social ties to members of the Church seems to occur relatively quickly after conversion in the case of converts or as peers begin drinking alcohol or having sex for lifelong members. Amy, a recent convert of about six months, reported that she has stopped going out with her friends:

Like some time my friends they like to go out. I always tell them, 'No. I am not feeling well.' Or 'I am not happy.' Or 'I am not in the mood here.' Then I feel, since I join the Church, I have like a new job. It's not easy. I'm not going to say everything is ok.

Several reported becoming estranged from friends when they converted to the Church. Many of those who did report friendships with individuals who weren't members of the Church reported that the relationships were strained.

Respondents reported two reasons for this. The first and primary reason is that since members adhere to different behavioral standards compared to individuals who are not members of the Church, they simply have less in common with individuals who



aren't members of the Church. The most common behavioral standards mentioned when discussing this issue were not drinking alcohol, going to church meetings on Sundays, and avoiding vulgar language. Sometimes respondents report cutting off social ties that they felt encouraged them to disobey Church teachings whereas other times the respondents report that their friends cut off social ties with them because they didn't participate in the same activities anymore. The second reason that respondents didn't establish friendships with people who weren't members was that the Church makes it so easy to establish friendships with other practicing Mormons that there is less of a perceived need for establishing and maintaining friendship with people who aren't members of the Church.

A similar dynamic occurs in immigrant communities. Immigrants simply have more in common with each other and often it is easier to make friends with other immigrants from a similar background than it is to reach out and make friends outside of the immigrant's culture.

Respondents indicated that several of the behavioral expectations of the Church made it difficult to socialize with individuals who were not members. The most common behavioral expectations that made socializing with individuals who aren't members difficult included not drinking alcohol, trying to keep Sunday as a holy day, and avoiding vulgar language. Pablo talked about how being a member of the Church made it difficult for him and his family to socialize with his Paraguayan immigrant community:

Here in Pennsylvania we have a lot of discrimination from our Paraguayan people. They always treat us different and always call us names. We used to have on our independence day; we used to have a big party. And we used to have some

meetings in parks in the summertime. It's nice to be around them sometimes... So, we go and we stand up for our standards and they try to get us to drink or to say bad words. No chance. And the reason why we are not more with them is because all of the activities are on Sundays. They used to invite us. Sorry, we can't go on Sundays. Why don't you do Saturday? We can meet on Saturday night. No, no. Well we can't do it, we're in church. So, yeah we have a lot of, I could call it discrimination because they are very nasty. But we show them that we are not afraid of them and we are there to give them the best example possible. We got a lot of respect from many people because of that, but you always have some smack-heads that just don't get it.

Miranda, who had immigrated as a child, talked about how it has been difficult for her to maintain friendships with people who have different standards of behavior:

Because I feel like you're friends with someone because there is something interesting or there is a common thread with them and that is kind of how you build friendships. Sometimes when other people want to be drinking and to be doing other things it makes it a little bit hard. Because I have a really good friend and she's not LDS but we're still pretty close. She's in California and I see her every now and then but sometimes it's awkward because it's "Oh I want to drink." I'll say go ahead and do that, it's fine, but then I'm bothered with that. Then I'm responsible for her, you know? "Don't get too crazy." And somehow you don't want to be worried about something like that. And so you just go towards people that have the same values so that you don't have to worry about things like that. And I think maybe more so now because I do have kids I am

more aware of who I am associating myself with. Because some people have no problems swearing around children and some people are a little more aware of that and that's fine. But it's like if it was just me by myself I think I would be ok, but how often am I by myself without my kids? It is very rare. So for example, where I used to live, some of the workers, I had befriended them. We were pretty good friends you know. I would talk to them whenever we would see each other. We tried to get together a couple of times but you know some times the things that they say aren't something that you necessarily want your kids to say.

Since young children are usually taught not to drink alcohol or use vulgar language, this issue becomes more problematic for lifelong members as their peers begin to get older and start drinking alcohol and forming serious relationships. Mariela spoke about her childhood in Mexico:

Everybody drinks alcohol. All your friends want to make you drink alcohol. Everybody at school dress differently than you. Almost everybody speaks with bad language. And one thing I think that I see and that I saw is that it's very difficult for both girls and boys to get a partner in the Church.

The second reason that participating in the Church made it difficult for respondents to make friendships with people who were not participating was that it was simply so much easier to make friends with other members of the Church. In addition to the fact that practicing members of the Church usually have shared values, participants reported that in the Church there were many opportunities to make friendships with other practicing members. Miranda reported:

...there are also a lot of activities in the Church and then you start making friends within the Church. I feel like I almost get a comfort zone because like everyone believes the same thing. I don't need to be worried as much. So I got comfortable to the point where now if any one who isn't LDS sometimes it gets a little harder to make that friendship, to find something in common so that you can be friends with them.

More quotes from participants on how easy it is to make friends in the Church can be found in the "Social Support" sub-section found earlier in this chapter.

#### *Other Burdens*

While all of the respondents mentioned social problems arising from participating in the Church, a minority of respondents also mentioned other difficulties caused by Church participation. The most common of these was disappointment felt because the Church or other people didn't do what the respondent would like them to do. Two female respondents, Miranda and Miledi, also reported having difficulty reconciling Church teachings on obtaining an education with Church teachings about starting a family and having children. Finally, two respondents expressed the idea that participating in the Church brings out negative personality characteristics in some people.

Of the three respondents who expressed disappointment in the Church or others not doing what they would like them to do, two wanted Church leaders to be more strict in enforcing Church discipline and one respondent expressed the desire that the Church would be more vocal in support for immigrants. Marcelino, who is currently undocumented, stated:

I wish that my church was more active in relation to addressing the problems faced by Hispanic immigrants. Sometimes I believe that my church, through my leaders, has a very passive approach to the problems we have. I see other religious institutions- like the Evangelicals, the Catholics, the Presbyterians, etcetera etcetera. They are constantly making pronouncements, constantly organizing events to support the well-being of those of us suffering here. We suffer because we lack documentation and that makes us live in the shadows and in poverty. Since we are people in the shadows, you could say clandestine people, we don't have a voice. We don't have a say. Nobody listens to us. Consequently, we need our religious leaders to be our voice because they know what is happening to us. They also know just like any other American member of the Church that we do what our leaders ask. We are faithful in the Church. We try to live orderly lives. Consequently we need support, like a son needs support from his father and like a daughter needs support from her mother. We Hispanics in the Church need the support of our leaders. (my translation)

Two female respondents reported difficulty reconciling Church teachings on obtaining an education and starting a family. Miranda put it this way:

I feel like the gospel is very family oriented. They say we should make families and stuff like that. And so I feel like, and, not that I regret the decision, I will never regret having my children, but it definitely has...I was only able to get my associates. And I've been really wanting to go back and finish my degree. So I guess it impacted in that I felt like I needed to have a family soon and I felt...so that kind of put a break on my education. But at the same time the Church makes

it very accessible as well. And they work with you. It doesn't matter if you're a mom or whatever, you can get an education. And they do emphasize that I feel. They do emphasize "get as much education as you can, keep learning"<sup>4</sup> and so I don't feel like they want you to not learn or anything. And I feel that push to keep learning because of the gospel. I guess any kind of formal education I have has been hampered because of the situation that we are in.

The other drawback to participating in the Church that one respondent offered was that it made some people judgmental towards others or fearful of doing things wrong:

This is just based off my experience and maybe I mentioned it already. Just I feel like if you are stuck in an LDS culture you tend to become overly judgmental or just so afraid of doing anything wrong that it doesn't really help you...you just become more aware of what other people are thinking about than what your Heavenly Father thinks about you. You do it for the sake of doing it, because other people are doing it and not because you want to do it. But I don't know. I just feel like everyone is so different in how they live it.

Some of the drawbacks of participating in the Church mirrored the drawbacks individuals experience immigrating to the United States. For example, individuals who immigrate to the United States and individuals who convert to the Church both open themselves up to the possibility of experiencing discrimination or becoming somewhat socially isolated from other groups. However, some costs seem to be more likely to come as a result from participation in the Church and some seemed to be more likely to stem

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<sup>4</sup> The participant is paraphrasing a speech from former Church president Gordon B. Hinckley.

from immigration. For example, family conflict seemed to result from participating in the Church but not so much from immigration. On the other hand, undocumented immigration led to financial and legal difficulties, especially for Marcelino who could not find work because of his undocumented status. These financial and legal difficulties did not happen when individuals converted to the Church.

### **Negotiating Costs and Benefits**

When initially asked a broad question about whether there were any drawbacks to participating in the Church, five of the 12 respondents responded that there were none at all. An additional two respondents indicated that they couldn't tell whether the negative things they experienced were because of the Church or from other factors. Of the five which initially reported drawbacks, two indicated that the drawbacks to participation were not important. Only after asking follow-up questions did all of the respondents eventually report things that could be construed as negative consequences of participating in the Church.

This finding is surprising considering the fact that rational choice theories of religion view Mormonism as a strict and therefore costly religion (Iannaccone, 1994; Olsen & Perl, 2005; Stark & Finke, 2000). To most observers who are not members of the Church of Jesus Christ, participation is obviously very costly: practicing members are expected to conform to various behavioral standards and pay 10% of their income to the Church in the form of tithing. How could these participants believe that there were no costs or drawbacks to participating in the Church?

There are several reasons why the costs of participating in the Church were not initially acknowledged by the respondents. First, many participants had done a good job

of structuring their life in such a way that the costs of participation were minimal. Second, many participants had adopted a worldview in which doing what the Church taught was desirable, and so following those teachings did not feel like a cost. From the perspective of supply-side theories of religious participation, these respondents consisted of a “market niche” that wanted a strict religion and got what they wanted. And third, many respondents viewed participating in the Church less like a financial transaction and more like a fundamental change in lifestyle and culture. Consequently, the idea of “costs” versus “benefits” did not resonate with them when thinking about their Church participation.

There are other possible explanations for why respondents do not report costs to religious participation that would not be observable in my interviews. For example, if participants felt that admitting that there were costs would be detrimental to them in some way than it is probable that they would not mention it. However, since this study uses essentially a grounded theory approach in which the explanations are derived from the study participants themselves, it is impossible for it to supply evidence for these alternative explanations.

One reason that participants did not perceive many of the costs to participating is that they structured their life in a way that minimized those costs. The primary way in which they did this was by reducing contact with individuals for whom their participation in the Church might become a source of contention. This may include family members, friends, or others. Jose explained when asked about how membership in the Church impacted his social life:



I left many friendships. I had to leave them. And, well, social circles and circles of friends I had to leave as well. Because before things were celebrated with beer and now they are celebrated with juice. That is something that changed. So in that aspect, the social aspect, there has been a drastic change. An enormous change.

(my translation)

As a result of these changes to their social circles, many of the respondents had few, if any, friends who were not practicing members of the Church. My interviews allowed me to see a glimpse of the other side of this strategy. The participant who currently was not attending church meetings reported that several of her friends who are active in the Church have started to reduce their social contact with her:

Because I'm inactive, I find that some people that I used to be friends with that are still active in the Church, if I reach out to them, they'll talk to me but I'm not included. Because I'm not active in the Church. So it's a little difficult but it is hard for me that it seems they can be friends with someone and as soon as they decide that they are not going to be in the Church for any period of time they just completely cut them out. I would think it would be the other way around, they would try to embrace them more. They would try to bring them in more. So I think that has also been a big factor in why I just don't go to church. Because I don't want people to just accept me because I'm a member. I want them to accept me for me.

Consistent with Embry's (1997) findings cited above, for members who had the option of attending a congregation in their native language versus a congregation that

held services in English, many strategically chose the congregation that they felt would either give them a benefit or make it less costly to go. For example, Marcelino, a Spanish-speaking respondent, reported that he was going to start attending the English-language congregation in order to improve his English language skills, “I’m going to change to the English ward for the language. I want to practice. (my translation)” However, Johan (who was bilingual) chose to go to the Spanish-speaking congregation because he shared a cultural background with the other congregants:

But the other thing that you can’t keep away from you is your culture, your traditions. And all the events over here (in the Spanish congregation), like Christmas events or community events. The Spanish, we are more touching. “Merry Christmas Brother!” You know, more close, *cariñoso*. American culture is more, “Hey, Merry Christmas! Have a great day!” And that’s it.

A second reason why participants did not find the costs of participation in the Church to be very relevant was that they simply did not want to do the things they were giving up. Participants tended to not report any desire to engage in activities that were contrary to Church teachings. Consequently, giving up those activities was not viewed as a constraint or a cost. According to supply-side economic theories of religious participation, these individuals would be part of a strict religion “market niche” that want strict religious beliefs. Louisa noted in her interview that she finds it funny that some people believe that they need alcohol or drugs in order to have fun in life:

I remember when I was pregnant with G. I went to my doctor for my check up and the nurse was preparing me for before the doctor come to see me. And she

was taking my blood pressure and she asked me if I smoked, and I say no. Do you drink? And I say no. And she says, well do you use drugs? And I say no. And she says, what do you do for fun? And I say, I have a lot of fun without those things. I don't need them to have fun. And she says, "Really, but your life is so boring." And I say no. Maybe you think that way, but I have so much fun with my family that I don't need those things in my life. It's funny that people think that because we don't smoke or we don't drink and use drugs that we are boring.

Determining when these preferences are developed might shed some light on the theoretical issues. If the preference not to drink alcohol or swear or to follow other Church teachings exists before conversion, it would support the idea of "religious market niches" that is advocated by supply-side economic theories of religious participation. As a reminder, religious market niches refer to the assumption that people want to participate in a religion with a certain level of strictness and religions compete for individuals in certain market niches. However, if the preferences for a strict religion develop after conversion, then it would be evidence against supply-side theories of religious participation.

The experiences of the respondents both support and contradict the idea of religious market niches and painted a somewhat more complicated picture than what is painted by supply-side theories. Sometimes the lack of a desire to do things contrary to Church teachings sometimes developed after individuals converted to the Church or sometimes they were present before an individual joined the Church. Sometimes both. For example, in Pablo's case health issues made him want to quit smoking and drinking before he was taught by the Mormon missionaries and so the Church's teachings merely

reinforced goals he already had. However, for years after his baptism, he indicated that he would rather play soccer on Sundays and not go to Church. Consequently he was not participating in Sunday services for many years. Other respondents mentioned how they stopped doing things contrary to Church teachings when they converted and then realized the benefits of it. Marcelino explained how he simply didn't drink coffee, smoke, or drink alcohol and so converting to the Church didn't complicate his life:

Does being a member of the Church complicate my life? Well, I thank God that it doesn't Daniel because it hasn't been very difficult for me. Would you like an example? No drinking liquor, no smoking, no drinking coffee, not having vices. Why aren't these things difficult? Because I've never had those vices, so that makes it very easy. This is not to say that the Church doesn't work in that aspect. It works because I know brothers and sisters in the Church that have had problems with addictions or vices and the Church has influenced them positively. It has helped them change. (my translation)

In my analysis, tithing stood out as an example of something that was a cost in the most tangible sense of the word and yet was almost never referred to by the respondents as a cost or burdensome. Not all of the respondents paid tithing, but even those respondents did not talk about tithing as a burden or cost. The reasons given for wanting to pay tithing include a desire to be obedient, a belief that God will bless you for it, or as an expression of gratitude for the things God has already blessed an individual with. Only one of these reasons, the idea that God would bless an individual for paying tithing, fits well into a rational choice theory of religious participation. Jose explained that the reason

tithing isn't viewed as a cost is because belief in the gospel makes an individual want to pay it:

Well, in a moment it (paying tithing) seems like a disadvantage because you don't have money to pay for things that you need. In order to pay for your expenses you all of a sudden have to decide if you are going to pay tithing. But it all is based on your testimony<sup>5</sup>. If you don't have a strong testimony, you need that money and you aren't going to pay that tithing. But if you learned that thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all your soul and all your strength<sup>6</sup> you are going to pay that tithing because God is first. It's a testimony thing, a faith thing. Tithing is something in the Church that usually is thought of as a law, a commandment of God. And in effect it is. But for me, tithing is gratitude for the blessings that I have received. Gratitude toward God for blessings I have already received. And that whole bit about the windows of heaven that will open and that will pour out blessings from heaven until they cannot be contained<sup>7</sup>, I'm still waiting for them to open but I continue paying my tithing out of gratitude. (my translation)

Participants developed a worldview in which doing things that the Church taught was desirable and that doing things that the Church discouraged was not desirable. Jose

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<sup>5</sup> The word "testimony" in Latter-day Saint culture refers to the level of belief someone has in the teachings of the Church.

<sup>6</sup> The participant is quoting the Bible. This and similar language can be found in various parts of the Bible including Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, and Luke 10:27.

<sup>7</sup> The participant is referring to the Biblical passage found in Malachi 3:10. The verse in the King James Version of the Bible reads "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

described this worldview as a “spiritual point of view” and contrasted it with a “temporal point of view” in which the teachings of the Church are burdensome.

If I want to see from a temporal point of view, the disadvantages (of participating in the Church) are the time I spend at church; that I can’t work on Sundays; that I have to pay my tithing. These things are disadvantages if you see them from a temporal point of view. But if you see them from a spiritual point of view they are not disadvantages. They are advantages because they are what permit you to strengthen your spirit and strengthen your faith. That is the reason we were baptized. Consequently, yes, they are advantages and not disadvantages. (my translation)

A different way in which participants thought of this was in terms of culture. Being a Mormon implied a certain worldview, behaviors, and set of knowledge similar to the way that being from a particular culture implies a certain worldview, behaviors, and set of knowledge. Adopting an identity as a Mormon meant becoming part of the culture of the Church. The Church culture often was contrasted by participants with the cultures of their nations of origin or of fellow immigrants. Vokel, who had been a Latter-day Saint for many years, had recently started attending a congregation in which there were many recent converts from his country of origin. He mentioned how it was strange that he identifies more with the Church’s culture now than he does with the culture of immigrants from his same country:

Q: How has participating in the Church impacted how well you have been able to maintain your culture? Or have you tried to maintain your culture at all?

A: Well to be frank with you I've been struggling when I come to the congregation where there are a lot of Liberians because where I was the only African-American or the African in Minneapolis where they were dominant white it was an opportunity for me to still learn. To learn even though coming into a Liberian congregation lately what I've comforted myself is an opportunity for me to teach. So when I go like in North Dakota, the only black there, almost everybody were my friends. Every opportunity was a learning or experience sharing. On the other hand the current congregation it's another learning process because to be frank with you, some of the Liberians that are just coming in the Church or have been in the Church don't have time to really read and know the principles. And I struggle with other things, like during sacrament meeting people walk up and down, they talk. So these are the things I have been asking myself lately. I get to know that it is an opportunity for me to find a way to teach the correct principles to these people as well. So it might be like cultural. Even though it's kind of funny for me to say when I am in a white congregation I feel more comfortable.

Q: More comfortable because they do a little bit better with the Church culture? So you connect better with the Church culture where it's mostly white?

A: Yeah

Q: Since they're such new converts with the Liberians they don't necessarily do the Church culture as well?

A: Yeah

Similar issues were brought up by other respondents. Many times, they would mention something that they felt was negative in their culture of origin and then talk about how the Church's culture helped them avoid that negative trait. The Church allowed them to keep aspects of their immigrant culture that they felt were positive and abandon aspects that they felt were negative. For example, Marcelino noted:

In Hispanic societies there is a lot of disorder. Sometimes a Hispanic says one thing and does another. A Hispanic promises to do something and doesn't do it. But here in the Church, because of its orderliness and the way it is organized, the Church forces Hispanics to start to learn to be orderly. (my translation)

Many of these respondents viewed participating in the Church as adopting this Church culture as their own. In this sense, participating in the Church is like living in a nation and converts are like immigrants. Both the experiences of immigration and conversion require adapting to a new culture, forming new social ties, and lessening contact with previous social ties. Just like nations have laws that they expect individuals in their jurisdiction to follow (and most do follow the laws without thinking about it), being a Mormon implies strong standards of behavior like not drinking alcohol or engaging in extramarital sex. Respondents accepted these standards of behavior as simply part of being a practicing Mormon. Similarly, just like standing too close to someone, calling someone fat, or not wearing deodorant could cause awkwardness or offense in American culture, not volunteering in the Church or standing up and shouting during prayers could cause awkwardness and offense in Mormon culture.



## **Conclusion to Findings Chapter**

The plurality of respondents did not choose to participate in the Church as a result of weighing the costs of participation versus the benefits of participation. They did not seem to think about the decision to participate in terms of making the choice that would give them the most net benefit. Rather, they participated in the Church because they believed that the Church's claims are true or because they felt that God wanted them to. The choice to believe the claims of the Church or the belief that God wanted them to participate was more salient than the weighing of costs versus benefits.

However, when specifically asked, the participants did mention several benefits to participating in the Church including emotional, financial, social, otherworldly, and health benefits. The Church also played a key role in helping several of these immigrants with the immigration process, although the form that help took varied widely.

There were also some costs associated with participating in the Church. Many of these costs were similar to the costs often associated with immigration and include facing discrimination and prejudice. Family conflict was also a major cost to participating in the Church that many of these immigrants faced.

Immigrants negotiated these costs and benefits various ways. One strategy for negotiating these cost and benefits was structuring their lives in such a way that the costs to participation were minimal. This was often done by abandoning social ties that would result in awkward situations or conflict. Another strategy was adopting a worldview in which doing things that the Church forbade was considered undesirable. Giving something up is not costly if you never wanted to do it in the first place. Sometimes participants adopted this worldview before conversion, sometimes after conversion, and sometimes

they adopted parts of it before conversion and parts of it after conversion. Finally, many respondents viewed the Church as having its own culture and participation was not viewed in terms of “costs” and “benefits” but rather in terms of enacting the cultural norms of the Church. In this way respondents viewed participation in the Church in a similar way that many people view living in a nation: to successfully assimilate you have to adjust to the culture and laws of where you are living.

## **Chapter 6: Practical Implications**

### **Overview**

Before discussing the implications that the findings from my interviews have for rational choice theory and the study of immigration and religion, it is important to note implications that the findings have for those seeking benefits for immigrants. As noted in the background chapter on immigration, immigrants to the United States face many barriers in accessing the resources they need to survive. Religious participation can be a resource for these immigrants because religious organizations usually do not impose the same requirements for receiving help that the government or agencies predominantly funded by the government do.

Religious participation was a resource for these Latter-day Saint immigrants and provided them with many tangible and intangible benefits. However, the level of benefits that were received varied and many respondents chose to forgo benefits that they could have accessed. Individuals working with Latter-day Saint immigrants should view their religious participation as a resource that can be used to address their needs, but also understand the institutional, doctrinal, and social factors involved in receiving aid through the Church.

### **Institutional Factors**

In most cases, there are very few formal requirements to accessing Church welfare. Instead, to limit abuse of the system, the Church places local volunteer bishops as gatekeepers to accessing Church welfare funds. The bishops are audited semiannually and if a bishop or his family has a welfare need they must go through a regional leader

(known as a “stake president”) to access Church welfare funds. Bishops receive information about welfare needs directly from needy individuals or through the Church’s Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Society. Institutionally, this means that the primary requirement for a recipient of Church welfare is for the bishop to find out about their need and assign resources to fulfill it.

This process can make it much easier for some individuals to receive welfare aid. For example, undocumented immigrants can receive aid through the Church welfare system because there are no citizenship or visa requirements. However, going through a bishop also can create a barrier for individuals and creates the potential for differential treatment. Bishops are individuals with their own prejudices and opinions. Some bishops may be more inclined to provide welfare or more proactive about seeking out needs in their congregation, or perhaps a bishop has a strong opinion about undocumented immigration that discourages them from allowing aid to go to undocumented immigrants. While none of the respondents mentioned being denied a request for aid, a few did mention that the proactive actions of Church leaders were important in them obtaining aid.

The way the Church welfare program is set up also creates a dynamic of reciprocity, with those who contribute time and resources to the Church being the most likely to benefit from Church welfare. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, including its welfare program, is run by volunteers at a local level. As discussed in previous chapters, individual members contribute a lot to the Church in terms of time, work, and resources. These individuals are the ones tasked with discovering welfare needs and addressing them either formally or informally, but they are also the most

visible to other members of the Church who have the same task. Consequently Church welfare, especially informal Church welfare, tends to feel reciprocal. Family A makes meals for family B because they know that family B would do the same for them. Family A knows this about family B because they have seen family B perform other volunteer work in the Church.

The Church encourages this sense of reciprocity in its formal welfare system in order to avoid an “entitlement mentality” and promote the self-reliance of members. To be clear, there is no formal requirement that an individual volunteer or be participating actively in the Church in order to receive aid. However, bishops are instructed to provide work and service opportunities when possible to individuals receiving welfare aid in order to prevent an entitlement mentality. One Church manual that discusses the Church welfare program gives the following instructions to bishops on this topic:

One of the most important basic principles (of a successful Church welfare program) includes providing work and service opportunities. For individuals to retain their dignity during a time of personal distress, opportunities for service and work commensurate with the recipients’ circumstances should be found. The value of the work or service need not be equal to the assistance received but rather sufficient to avoid the evils of the dole and the fostering of an entitlement mentality. The ward council can assist by compiling and maintaining a list of meaningful work opportunities (LDS Church, 2009).

Evidence for this reciprocal dynamic as well as the importance of proactive effort on the part of local church leaders can be clearly seen in the following quote from one of

the respondents. In this quote, Eraida describes how the Church helped her family when her husband lost his job:

And then I'll say, I don't know how many years ago, my husband was without work. And we are very self-reliant, I work hard and my husband too. But our Relief Society President came and G was on his mission. So that was about 5 years ago. She knew my husband was without work. And she said, "You know E, you do so much for others. Why don't you let us one month, just four weeks or two weeks, go and get something from the bishop's store." And I was like, "No, no." And she was like, "Just something, get something." And so I told my husband, "Maybe we need to be more humble. We are ok, but it is getting long." It was almost a year that he didn't have a job. And so we were getting kind of a little worried. You know, G still had a year to go and we weren't doing well. And so we received some help with some groceries. And it was just the...we walked there and I just started crying because I thought how much wisdom our prophet receives from our Heavenly Father. Because I had come there before as a volunteer, but never as a receiver. And it was a really nice experience. I felt it was a blessing to go and be on the other end.

This quote shows the importance of relationships with local Church leaders as well as the importance of the principle of reciprocity in the Church welfare system. In this quote we see that this individual would not have gotten aid without the intervention of a Relief Society president who saw her family's need and convinced them that they could use the aid. In order to convince this respondent to get aid, the Relief Society president appealed to the idea of reciprocity: the individual had helped others in the past

and therefore it was morally alright for her to receive help in her time of need. Later in the quote, Eraida refers to the fact that she had volunteered at the bishop's storehouse in the past and that being on the other end of the service was a nice experience.

### **Doctrinal Factors**

Mormon theology places a strong emphasis on developing self-reliance in various areas of an individual's life. This theological emphasis has permeated the Church's welfare plan and influences how it is administered and viewed. Evidence for this can be found in a statement from the Church's informational website on its welfare plan:

Many members might think of welfare as a program to help members in temporarily difficult circumstances. But the intent of the Church's welfare plan is much more vast; it also involves promoting self-reliance as a way of life. President Thomas S. Monson has taught that self-reliance—"the ability, commitment, and effort to provide the necessities of life for self and family"—is an essential element of our temporal and spiritual well-being.

A mere desire to become self-reliant is not enough. We must make a conscious, active effort to provide for our own needs and those of our families. Bishop H. David Burton, Presiding Bishop, reminds us that when we have done all we can to be self-reliant, "we can turn to the Lord in confidence to ask for what we might yet lack." Being self-reliant allows us to bless others. Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles says, "Only when we are self-reliant can we truly emulate the Savior in serving and blessing others."

Self-reliance involves several facets of a balanced life, including (1) education, (2) health, (3) employment, (4) family home production and storage, (5) family finances, and (6) spiritual strength (LDS Church, 2014).

There are three important practical implications of this doctrine of self-reliance.

(1) It impacts the type of welfare that the Church provides. (2) Members develop a desire to be viewed as self-reliant. This can have both positive and negative ramifications. On a positive note, it serves as a motivating factor for many members to actually gain skills and resources that will enable them to provide for themselves and their families.

However, being viewed as dependent on others or the Church may be viewed as shameful or as a weakness by some members. (3) Many people who distribute Church welfare funds are hesitant to provide ongoing welfare aid without evidence that the individual receiving aid is making efforts to become self-reliant. I will provide evidence for these assertions from the interviews in the sub-sections below.

#### *Impact on type of aid provided*

The Church's welfare system prioritizes aid that helps people to become self-reliant. While there is some flexibility for bishops at a local level in deciding what this means, most often it results in aid taking the form of temporary relief to help an individual or family cope with temporary problems, education, and assistance in finding and securing employment. The Church's welfare program, at least the formal welfare program, is not as well suited to addressing problems that require continual support.

The respondents gave many examples of the type of support most commonly provided through the Church's welfare program. Several reported receiving temporary



aid to help them through a difficult patch in life. For example, Pablo mentioned help dealing with a medical problem and some financial help after he lost his job. You can also see that Pablo is careful to note that his family strives to be self-sufficient as he talks about the help he has received:

I remember I went once to ask for help from my bishop for a dental problem. I got some cavities that was getting too bad from the pain. So yeah I got help because I had no insurance and the cost was high. So the bishop knew somebody who was doing it- a good deal for members of the Church, a low price. And so he helped me out with that. So, we don't use the Church for anything. Since we came here our goal was work hard and try to be self-sufficient. After I had a situation where I lost my job and then I tried to survive, I got help from the Church on various occasions until I could get a job again. So from then we pretty much handle ourselves pretty well.

This respondent mentioned receiving help when he had a dental problem and when he lost his job, but also emphasized several times that he was self-sufficient and did not have to rely on the Church for his needs.

Other respondents noted getting help with both informal and formal education in order to help them become more self-sufficient. Several respondents mentioned that the Church taught them how to store food and other necessities in case of times of emergencies and other skills that helped them save money. Another respondent, Amy, mentioned how the Church helped her with tuition costs. In the Philadelphia area, respondents had access to a Church program called "Pathways," which is designed to

prepare people for college and gives them access to reduced cost online courses through one of the Church's universities. Pablo, who was taking advantage of the program, described it:

A: And I'm getting to the peak of my age here. The Church basically gave me a chance to have a career, now with the BYU Pathways.

Q: Are you participating in the Pathways program?

A: Yep. We are next week we finish our second semester. So, doing well.

Q: What degree are you getting through it?

A: I picked landscaping engineers for a major and I'm not decided yet if I will go for computer...I have to see what area in computer or accounting as a minor.

Q: So the Pathway program, that essentially gives you a free.. Is it free or do you have to pay tuition?

A: No. It's cheaper because we have to pay \$65 per credit. This semester it has \$365 because we have 3 classes. In the first year... it's pretty good because in my case, I haven't been to school for 35 years and I don't remember anything. If were to go for my SAT now I don't think I would pass. Well, I could pass now, but 6 months before? Not even close. And this past three months I've learned a lot more about the gospel than I've learned in the whole 30 years of being a member.

Q: Because you have to take religion classes?

A: Yeah. And teaching is more specific and more direct than what you get in church every Sunday because you get to work deep on each prophet starting in the Book of Mormon, biography and lifescapes, and testimony and recent and past teachings of the prophets and the counselors and the twelve. So you can learn a lot more. And the preparation...this semester we have math. If you asked me to do algebra or geometry three months ago? Not even close. Now I feel like I could do anything because it is just bringing back the memory and starting to remember again. It's very important and very healthy. Hopefully I can get there. Its two years for an associate's degree and four years for a bachelor's degree. We'll see how far I can get. This first year is basically preparation. In December we are supposed to start the real classes. Because the Pathway is basically the preparation for everyone who hasn't finished their high school or can't go to college because they have to fulfill some other requirements. Once I finish this semester I will probably go and get my SAT and then jump into college if I want to.

Q: So that's an experimental program just for our area, right?

A: Well, this program is running very well in many places for many years already. This just started here last year, two semesters ago. And now it's expanding. And in Boston I think they opened it for not members. So, but it's a restriction for them because they have to live the Honor Code<sup>8</sup>. So, whoever accepts to live the Honor Code and follow the religion part of the coursework like any non-member going to BYU Idaho or BYU Provo, they have to do the same thing. So that's an

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<sup>8</sup> The Honor Code refers to the behavioral standards that students at Church owned universities are required to follow. It includes several behavioral requirements that make it difficult for individuals not living an LDS lifestyle to follow it.

experiment that they are doing right now. But, they never expected that they would have more than 15 or 20 over here and it was about 60 or 80 people who signed up. Yeah, so from that one we probably have 40 still in the class. Several dropped. It's not easy. It's not easy when you have been out of school for a long time, you work and they demand a lot of hours to start.

The Pathways program exemplifies the type of program that appeals to the Church welfare system because it is a program that enables people to improve their situation in life and become more self-reliant. The intention of the program is that individuals will be able to go to college and get degrees that will help them to make money on their own.

Finally, several respondents mentioned getting jobs or help finding jobs through social connections at Church. For example, Eraida got a job she heard about from the wife of her home teacher:

I worked with a lady and her husband was our home teacher. And so she was working at a hotel and she was a housekeeper supervisor and she said, 'You know, at my job they are needing maids.' And I needed a job because I was babysitting kids and I needed to help my husband."

Other respondents mentioned getting support, such as help with transportation, that helped them get a job. Help finding employment is another type of aid that fits well with the doctrinal emphasis on self-reliance, because once employment is secured the individual hopefully will be able to use that employment to take care of their own needs.

*Members want to be self-reliant*

The doctrinal emphasis on self-reliance was reflected in the attitudes of the respondents. Respondents spoke positively about self-reliance and talked about how they had developed or were developing skills to become more self-reliant. However, in some instances this prizing of self-reliance may cause individuals to become embarrassed when acknowledging that they needed to rely on others for support. During the interviewing process I was in the unique position of being a financial clerk in the congregation that a few of these respondents attended and I consequently know that some respondents did not admit to receiving financial help from the Church even though they had received help. While the reason they did not disclose this information is unclear, one possible reason is a desire to portray themselves as self-reliant.

A few respondents that had received help from the Church made a point that they were not dependent on the Church to live:

A1<sup>9</sup>:... But moving here, no, we don't really need the Church to help us survive.

Q: So it sounds like they've helped you through a couple of crises, but you've been able to be self-sufficient beyond that.

A1: We'd ask our bishop once in a while, but not for ....

A2: Not to come here, not to live from the Church.

Another respondent, Miledi, contrasted those who were self-sufficient with those who were "needy" and indicated that Church Welfare was only for those who were needy:

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<sup>9</sup> Two of the respondents were married and chose to be interviewed together. This quote includes statements from both the husband and the wife (designated as A1 and A2).

Q: Have you ever received help from the Church? For example, help with food or some other economic help?

A: No, we have always tried to be very self-sufficient and tell ourselves, “No that is there for the needy.” And I think that the Lord has always given me what I need. (my translation)

These respondents’ comments make it clear that they do not want to be dependent on the Church to fulfill their needs. They desire to be viewed as self-sufficient and able to take care of their own needs. Consequently, while Church teachings about self-reliance have the positive impact of motivating individuals to gain skills to take care of themselves and their families, those who work with Latter-day Saint immigrants should also be aware that clients may be reluctant to discuss times when they have needed help in the past and realize that client may be hesitant to ask for help.

*Gatekeepers look for evidence of effort when providing ongoing aid*

The doctrinal emphasis on self-reliance also results in bishops, who are the primary gatekeepers to Church welfare assistance, seeking evidence that the individual receiving the aid is trying to improve their own situation. Since one of the major goals of the Church welfare system is to increase self-reliance, bishops may be very reluctant to distribute aid that they feel would contribute to individuals becoming dependent on the Church. One of the Church’s administrative manuals makes it clear that the purpose of the Church welfare program is to help people who are willing to work to help themselves:

The purposes of Church welfare are to help members become self-reliant, to care for the poor and needy, and to give service. In 1936 the First Presidency outlined a welfare plan for the Church. They said: “Our primary purpose was to set up ... a

system under which the curse of idleness would be done away with, the evils of a dole abolished, and independence, industry, thrift and self respect be once more established amongst our people. The aim of the Church is to help the people to help themselves. Work is to be re-enthroned as the ruling principle of the lives of our Church membership” (LDS Church, 2010)

This has practical implications for Latter-day Saints seeking welfare aid and professionals who work with them. Primarily, it means that individuals receiving Church welfare often need to demonstrate to the bishop that they are trying to improve their situation. This emphasis also results in many bishops assigning tasks to recipients of welfare aid as a condition for receiving aid. For example, a bishop may ask an individual who is receiving aid to create a written household budget and show it to him as a condition for receiving additional aid.

#### *Other Doctrinal Tenets impacting Social Welfare*

Besides self-reliance, there were other doctrinal tenets that influenced the social welfare of the participants. One of these factors was the Church’s emphasis on raising children and the promotion of a family type in which the mother stays home to care for children. In 1995 Church leaders issued a document often referred to by members of the Church as “The Proclamation.” This document states some of the Church’s teachings about the family, including that God’s commandment to “multiply and replenish the earth” (i.e. have children) remains in force and that mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children:

The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

...

By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed. (The Family: A Proclamation to the World, 1995).

The Proclamation is often interpreted as encouraging members of the Church to have children and for mothers to care for those children unless circumstances make that situation impossible. The decision to have children or for mothers to take responsibility for nurturing their children has several potential practical impacts on the welfare of Mormon immigrants. For example, two of the female respondents mentioned this doctrinal emphasis when talking about why stopped going to college to get an education. One of these respondents, Miledi, talked about how she has struggled with following the



teachings of the Church in terms of getting an education because she followed the Church's other teachings about starting a family:

Q: Has being a member of the Church impacted your ability to get an education?

Did you go to college?

A: No, I didn't go. I dropped out after only a year. I think that being a member of the Church and listening to the prophet, they always say that you need to study and improve yourself. They help you go to college. I dropped out because for me it was so important to be a mom and be with them (her daughters). I don't know if it was good or bad. I learned a lot of things through the Church but I didn't finish my degree. Well, I am a teacher in my country. Now I think that, perhaps, maybe now that my daughters are a little bit older I'll have to go back. Here I feel like it would be very difficult to return. (my translation)

Another doctrinal factor that may impact whether some respondents receive aid from the Church is a belief that suffering may bring an individual closer to God. This perspective arose in only one of the interviews. A convert to the Church, Marcelino, explained that he does not ask for aid despite being in need because he feels that experiencing his needs brings him closer to God:

Q: Has the Church ever helped you with finances? Food or anything like that?

A: Let me tell you. I have done a lot of work in the bishop's storehouse. Young man, when they say "We need someone to help at the cannery"<sup>10</sup> I am always

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<sup>10</sup> This respondent is referring to a volunteer assignment to work in a Church-operated cannery. The Church produces many of the commodities that end up in bishop's storehouses or are used in humanitarian aid efforts. The farms and processing facilities

there. I don't ask for food. I'm not asking anything from the Church. Not because I don't need anything, rather because I feel that if I have to be needy it is because I need to. Because when I am in needy in this country, I am enlarging my Spirit and my character, I am becoming closer to God. (my translation).

This particular interviewee was the only participant who expressed this rational for not receiving help from the Church in this way. The desire to be self-reliant was a much more common rational for not asking for or receiving aid.

### **Social Factors**

Social capital can have a profound impact on the well-being of individuals and participating in the Church can dramatically impact an individual's social capital. The decision to participate in the Church can result in both negative and positive changes to social capital with resulting negative and positive changes to the welfare of the individual participating in the Church.

On the negative side, participating in the Church can strain relationships both for converts and for lifelong members. This strain can result in conflict or in individuals receiving less support from others. For example, one lifelong member –Miranda– described how the tension created in the Church between expecting individuals to live a certain way and allowing them to make their own decisions caused family conflict:

But in the family where I grew up I had felt like it was hard. I had one brother who it seemed like never made mistakes. It always felt like he did the right thing

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(including canneries) used to produce these commodities often use volunteer labor from Church members.

all the time. So if we ever did anything wrong we would kind of deem him the “self-righteous” one who was always looking down on us. And so there was always that resentment there. And there was one who was just tired of having to...I don’t know. It was always like “You know better, you know the gospel, why aren’t you doing it?” I feel like with that pressure that it kind of got to some of us who felt like “Why do we want to do it anymore?” So they didn’t do it anymore and so just kind of made their own choices. But, I don’t know, I feel like I could give a lot of examples. In my mind it’s complicated. I feel like we’re always torn between doing what’s right and how we feel at the time.

...

We have an ideal of what we want in the end of this life. We have an ideal of...we’re going to be rejoicing and be in heaven and we’ll all be together and we’re celebrating. But the way that we’re going it doesn’t feel like we’re going to get there. So I think sometimes it’s hard because we have that perception of what we want and the other person is not doing it. And I sometimes feel like, “Oh they’re judging me because these are the choices I want to make. You’re being judgmental and you’re not being loving. You’re not being like the Savior taught you.” But at the same time sometimes you feel like, “Now I’m judging you, but this is what’s right. And what you’re doing is wrong. I agree with you.” But then it comes off as “you are being closed-minded. Oh you’re not trying to understand my perspective.” And so, that part, at some point you are always going to be knocking heads with each other because one person wants to live in one way and the other person wants to live another way and says, “Well it’s wrong.” And then

everywhere else the whole world is telling you that it's fine. So it gets messy sometimes. Because you want something...and I think in our family the hardest part is you have the gospel in your life, why can't we find a way to still love each other despite our mistakes? And I feel like that is the biggest thing. Because when my brother got married, my parents were not the nicest. They were saying things that were just awful. And in my mind my there is, "You've been in the bishopric, you've been..." He wasn't the bishop, he was one of the counselors. He goes to the temple each week as a temple worker and then he comes out and says this sick...they say these things. And in my mind I'm saying, "Why? Why are you saying these things? If you had the Spirit with you, you wouldn't be saying these things. Or if you were trying to think of the way our Savior would react to something that you don't necessarily agree with you would not react this way." And so I feel like if they have an understanding, why is this happening? And a lot of times they will be like, "Well, why do you this?" I feel like a lot of our relationship is based on, "You have the gospel, you know what is right, you know what is wrong, you know that we are trying to be like our Savior and yet you do these things." And so I feel like that sometimes makes it difficult to have a good relationship. Because you want to be so much like our Savior and then when they are not doing those things you feel pressured. Or even when they just aren't making the best choices or the things that you would expect them to be doing if they wanted to be a family that lives together forever.

Social strain can also impact the lives of converts negatively. Many converts reported losing friends and damaging relationships with family members when they

converted to the Church. One respondent even chose to conduct the interview in English instead of Spanish because he did not want to anger his Spanish-speaking mother who was a different religion and lived in the same house. Sometimes this strain can have negative repercussions on individuals' financial well-being as well. Louisa talked about marrying a member of the Church and then postponing converting herself because she did not want to get thrown out of the house by her parents:

So all my life my parents were nagging me with the Catholic, but it wasn't enough for me. Then when I met him and he invited me to go to church I felt that that was the place that I want to be. So I never decided to give that up right away, because I was afraid of my parents. Because we used to live with my parents after we got married and I was afraid that they were going to ask us to leave the house. And we didn't have enough money to go and live on our own. And I don't want to go and live at my parents-in-law house. So I just kept holding and tried to prepare my parents so that they can accept the gospel.

Another social aspect that practitioners who work with Latter-day Saint immigrants need to be aware of is the social dynamic of receiving aid in the Church. In order to receive formal welfare aid in the Church, individuals need to talk about their financial troubles with the bishop and possibly other people as well (Relief Society presidents, home teachers, etc.). In most cases, the person receiving aid knows these people fairly well. While the bishop and others who work in the Church Welfare system are instructed to keep welfare matters as confidential as possible, it is impossible for those receiving welfare help to remain completely confidential. Structurally, it is impossible to receive aid without at least two people within the congregation finding out

about it. This is because each time Church resources are spent, it requires the approval, in the form of a signature, of the bishop and at least one other person- usually a financial clerk or counselor to the bishop. Often, even more individuals in the congregation hear about welfare needs because the bishop delegates to other volunteers to help assess needs and distribute welfare.

On the positive side, participating in the Church can greatly increase an individual's social capital. Respondents mentioned finding jobs, getting help moving, and several other benefits from other members of the Church simply because they knew each other. Opportunities to give and get help arise often. Miranda, who was facing financial difficulties at the time of the interview, mentioned that people are always willing to help each other and gave an example of how another member of the Church offered her a job:

There are always people who are willing to help you. Sister A was starting her own business and since we work really well together she said, "If you can find me clients I will pay you X amount of money." We weren't able to do it, but had I had more time to go out and do things that would have been another source of income.

Putnam and Campbell (2010) described how attending religious congregations can create morally charged social ties that can be particularly useful in mobilizing help. After presenting data showing that religious individuals tend to have more friends, tend to volunteer more, and tend to give more to charity, they explain their findings by pointing to religious social networks:

We suspect that religiously based ties are morally freighted in a way that most secular ties are not, so that pleas for good works (giving, volunteering, joining a reform movement, serving as a leader in some civic organization, and so forth) seem more appropriate and weightier than comparable requests from a co-worker or someone you know from the gym. (p. 477)

The fact that the social ties of Church members are often morally freighted can easily be seen in the interviews I conducted. The Church culture expects people to act according to certain moral principles and individuals who do not act that way often experience isolation or social conflict in the Church, as can be seen in previous quotes from the individual who was not attending services or the individual describing how the teachings of the Church caused conflict in her family growing up. One of the moral dynamics of religious congregations is that they are meant to be a community in which people help and serve each other. Consequently, many of the recipients of the volunteering and donations are other members of the congregations in which these individuals participate. When someone falls on hard times or needs social support, it is not uncommon for them to turn to other members of their congregation and to receive help.

Participants, especially those outside of Utah, compared this moral dynamic to that of a family. Amy- who had converted to the Church about 6 months earlier- stated in her interview, “Like the member of the Church, when we go there it is like all one family. Nobody picks and choose. Black, white we are all mingled. So like it’s very...I like the Church for that.” The expectation and the culture is that everyone will be kind and helpful. Johan said:

They don't distinguish by colors or sizes. That is one thing I like about the Church, the LDS. There can be a really dark person come over there and enjoy and partake of the sacrament and they are happy to have them. And that's what I love of the Church. Some big catastrophe happens in Asia or Mexico or what have you and the Church takes a lot of stuff over there. They really feel to help people. And that's one thing I love. I like it.

Consequently, the findings from my interviews reinforce the findings of Putnam and Campbell that social relationships in the Church have a moral dynamic that makes requests for people to help others feel more appropriate. The culture of the Church is one where people are expected to help each other.

### **Conclusion to Practical Implications**

Immigrants who choose to participate in Mormonism gain access to many potential resources. However, taking advantage of these resources requires an understanding and acceptance of the institutional, doctrinal, and social context of participating in the Church. Especially important is an understanding that the Church welfare system is based on a doctrinal foundation of promoting self-reliance and that aid is accessed through social networks, especially a relationship with the bishop and other church leaders. Also, it is important to understand that Church welfare operates in a culture of reciprocity and morally charged social ties.

Practitioners working with Latter-day Saint immigrants should view their Church participation as a strength while understanding that these dynamics can impact whether or not any given individuals will be able to access support through the Church. Clients who



are Mormon but who are not participating may have a harder time accessing aid through the Church because they are less visible to active members and gatekeepers are less likely to know them well. Clients who are practicing Mormons may want to be viewed as self-reliant or be hesitant about other individuals in their congregation finding out about their needs. Social workers or other individuals who work with Mormon immigrants should be aware of Church participation as a potential resource and talk with their clients about how comfortable they would be accessing Church welfare or asking fellow members of the Church for help.

## **Chapter 7: Theoretical Implications**

### **Overview**

This chapter will discuss how theoretical approaches towards the intersection of immigration and religion can or should be adjusted in light of current findings. First, I will discuss how the findings support or detract from a rational choice theory of religious participation. Second, I will discuss an alternate theoretical approach: viewing religious participation as analogous to being a citizen of a nation. As part of this discussion I will explain how sociological theories surrounding immigration may help social scientists better understand the processes of religious conversion and participation.

### **Rational choice theory in light of the findings**

At a certain level, my findings mostly support rational choice theory in the sense that almost all of the interviewees believed that the benefits of participation outweighed the costs. Even the individual who was not currently attending meetings believed that it was beneficial to be Mormon even though the cost of attending church meetings was too high. However, most did not seem to view their participation as a rational calculation of costs versus benefits. Consequently, viewing a decision as a rational choice is a theoretical construct that is imposed by the researcher and is not how the individuals in this study usually think about religious participation.

The rational choice theory of religious participation suggests that people participate in religious organizations because the costs of participation are less than the benefits of participation. In order for this theory to work, religious participation must involve both costs and benefits. My findings support the idea that religious participation

produces benefits from the perspective of the religious participants. The benefits described by my participants are similar to the benefits described in other studies of religious immigrants: financial benefits, social benefits, help integrating into the host society, otherworldly benefits, etc. The findings suggest that choosing to participate in a religion can help immigrants in multiple ways.

In fact, most of the respondents mentioned in one way or another that they were more religious after having immigrated to the United States than they were in their countries of origin. Of those who had a period in which they did not participate in the Church, most of the time that period transpired while they were in their country of origin. This finding is consistent with a rational choice framework and the idea that immigrants receive greater benefits for religious participation than non-immigrants. However, the weighing of costs versus benefits did not seem like a conscious process for most of the immigrants. For example, Amy noted that in the United States she attends church more regularly than when she lived in Sierra Leon, but she doesn't know why:

Q: So do you think you go to church more here where you live in the United States or did you go to church more in Sierra Leon?

A: Here I think I go to church more. More here. Yeah. Over there I go there but I'm not lie, not all the time I was going to church. Like every two weeks sometime I go there.

Q: Why do you think it is, why do you think you go to church more here?

A: I don't really know.

Consistent with rational choice theory, my findings also support the idea that religious participation entails costs as well. Participants reported a few different kinds of costs. The most burdensome of these costs were social costs. These social costs included exposure to discrimination and stress on social ties with people who are not participating in the Church.

Rational choice theory also implies a worldview in which the value of everything can be tabulated and weighed against each other. Unfortunately, religious activities usually do not have an objective value and consequently individuals must- either consciously or unconsciously- assign value to objects and activities. Religious beliefs give immigrants (and everyone) wide latitude in assigning value to costs and benefits. Consequently, the value someone receives from paying tithing is much higher for a religious person who believes that if they pay tithing God will open up the windows of heaven and pour blessings down upon them. For someone who simply believes that paying tithing is donating 10% of your income to a church, the value is obviously much less.

It can be argued that the same phenomenon happens with any purchase. My mother-in-law, for example, is very interested in the history of fashion and was recently describing to me her intent to purchase some ornamental Spanish fans. Throughout the conversation, she described what made these fans worth their cost: their beauty, their historical value, etc. In addition, she recently received an inheritance and had some extra money, so the purchase made complete sense to her. But to me, someone who does not care very much about the history of fashion and for whom money is a little scarcer, exchanging some of my hard earned money for ornamental Spanish fans would be

foolish. It is the same product and the same cost, but whether one of us decides to buy it depends entirely on the value that we assign to our money and the product itself. My mother-in-law rationalizes her decision to buy the fan by valuing the fans more than her money and I rationalize my decision not to buy the fan by valuing my money more than the fans. This process may be occurring somewhere in the back of our minds and we may not be very aware of it, but in order for rational choice theory to work it must be a process that is happening. The person considering the purchase must make the purchase rational by choosing what value to assign to both the cost and the benefit.

However, this explanation begs the question: why do people choose to adopt one worldview or preference over another? This is impossible to know using a conceptual framework based in rational choice theory. Supply-side economic theories simply take preferences as something that are relatively constant and refer to individuals with different worldviews and preferences as “market niches.” But preferences and worldviews are not constant: people can convert to a religion and can change their preferences.

A simple thought experiment shows how rational choice theory is inadequate in explaining how individuals adopt a religious worldview: Imagine you are a rational choice theorist reacting to the choice between adopting the worldview of Mormonism and a secular worldview (what Jose referred to as “spiritual” and “temporal” points of view). If you adopt the spiritual worldview, the benefits of participating in Mormonism are overwhelming and the costs are almost nonexistent in comparison. If you adopt the temporal worldview, perhaps there are some benefits, but the costs to participating are enormous (10% of your income, strict behavioral requirements, demands on time,

changing your social networks, etc.). No matter which you choose, the comparison of costs versus benefits validates your choice. From an individual perspective, rational choice theory cannot explain why someone would choose one worldview over the other.

Some religious individuals do participate in religion because doing so gives them benefits and some individuals choose not to participate because it is too burdensome to do so; however the plurality of respondents in this study did not think of their religious participation in that way. Consequently, explaining why individuals participate in a strict religious group requires something in addition to rational choice theory. One option would be simply to say that individuals have agency in choosing which worldview or preference to adopt. In this scenario, it would be better to describe rational choice theory, especially in terms of choosing whether to participate in a particular religion, as *rationalize* choice theory. Adding the -ize at the end of rational recognizes that the individual involved in the choice has leeway in making the choice rational or not. They do this by adopting certain worldviews and preferences that impact the value of what they are paying and what they are receiving.

This option fits well with my data. The decision to believe in the teachings of a religion is such an essential component to rationalizing the choice to participate that the plurality of the respondents simply cited the truthfulness of the Church as the main reason that they participate. If the teachings of the religion are true, then the benefits of participation clearly overwhelm any costs. In fact, the costs become so negligible by comparison to the benefits that they pretty much do not exist.

While this *rationalize* choice theory fits the experiences of this study's participants much better than the straightforward rational choice theory applied to religious participation, it makes it much more difficult to test the theory using quantitative measures because it rejects a deterministic view of human nature. Social statistics cannot explain why an individual adopts a certain worldview because the individual has agency and their decision is not controlled by social forces. Predicting whether an individual will choose to adopt or reject a worldview is much more difficult than counting up costs and benefits that have been assigned value by the researcher.

### **An Alternative to Rational(ize) Choice Theory**

Rationalize choice theory fits the findings from my interviews well. However, it does not fit the entire body of literature on religious participation well. Decisions to convert or remain in a religion clearly are influenced by social forces at some level. For example, individuals raised in a religion are much more likely to profess that religion when they reach adulthood than someone not raised in that religion, which would not be the case if social forces had no influence on the decision to adopt a religious worldview. If individuals chose which religion to belong to without any influence from external social forces, geography and family history would not be correlated with religious participation the way that they are. Individual agency may play a major role, but it does not completely account for the decision to participate in a religious group.

In addition, the proposed rationalize choice theory of religion does not fit the goals of social science well. These goals include obtaining the ability to predict behavior.

Attributing behavior to individual agency rules out the ability to predict it, and therefore does not accomplish this important goal of science.

A possible alternative to rationalize choice theory would be to apply theories designed to explain immigration to religious participation. It makes more sense to borrow theories from the sociology of immigration to explain religious behavior than to borrow theories from economics. Converting to a religion is much more similar to immigrating to a country than it is similar to buying a car. Both the processes of immigrating to a country and converting to a religion require changing social ties, both require learning new customs and behaviors, and both often involve learning new words if not a whole new language. In addition, stories and metaphors of immigration already abound in religious texts and many religious individuals already understand their process of choosing how and where to practice religion as a religious journey from one place to another.

For those who study religion, part of the appeal of viewing conversion and immigration as similar is that immigration is so much more observable than religious belief. Where a person is physically is infinitely easier to understand and observe than where a person is spiritually. This means that empirical evidence in which social scientists can ground theory is much easier to come by when studying immigration as compared to religion. Scholars can take the theories developed in the study of immigration and then try to discover if they apply to religious participation in a similar way.

Where an individual is born and raised usually predicts what nation they will end up living in and what religion an individual is raised in usually predicts what religion



they will participate in in the future. Viewing religious participation this way makes the term “immigrant” and the term “convert” analogous. Rather than arriving in a new destination country, converts to a religion arrive in a new destination religion or worldview. Also, if we extend the analogy further, practicing members of a religion can be compared to acculturated members of a society. Acculturated immigrants become functioning parts of their adopted society and practicing converts become functioning parts of their adopted religion.

The need for acculturation arises both in religious participation and in immigration. Several respondents viewed the Church as a culture and would sometimes even talk about the Church’s culture as if it were the culture of another country. Miranda, whose parents were Filipino but who was born in Saudi Arabia, spoke about it this way as she talked about the cultural influences on her, “I think my culture is still very Filipino. I connect with the Church culture and the Filipino culture because both are very family oriented.” Vokel, who was from Liberia and was quoted in a previous chapter, talked about how he was more comfortable among long-term members of the Church than among recent converts, even if the recent converts were immigrants from Liberia like he was. This was attributed to the fact that the recent Liberian immigrants have not learned how to participate in the Church’s culture very well.

In this analysis, it is important to distinguish between the Church’s culture and American or Anglo culture. Someone could be completely integrated in the Church’s culture and yet be marginalized in the American culture, or vice versa. Things like fluency in English or associating with native born Americans may be signs of acculturation into American culture, but they are not signs of acculturation in the Church

of Jesus Christ's culture. Likewise, attending Latter-day Saint church services and not drinking alcohol are signs of acculturation into the Church's culture but are not signs of acculturation into American culture.

There were examples of differing levels of integration into the Church's culture versus American culture in my findings. One example was Miledi, who was attending a Spanish-language unit in New Jersey. Despite living legally in the United States for 20 years, she has never become a naturalized citizen. She does not speak English and spoke about how her husband was racially profiled by police, but she seemed to be completely integrated into the Church's culture:

Q: Has there been a time in your life when you weren't participating in the Church? When you were inactive?

A: I have never been inactive. I've always had a recommend<sup>11</sup>.

Q: When you immigrated to the USA, did being a member of the Church help you?

A: I think that it helped because we could come that first Sunday after we arrived and come to church and I felt good. I felt like I had my siblings there, my brothers and sisters of the Church. And since it was a small branch we really were all like a family." (my translation).

However, despite feeling like the Church was her family, she felt prejudice from the American culture:

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<sup>11</sup> A "recommend" refers to a document certifying that an individual is qualified to participate in ordinances in Mormon temples. In order to obtain one an individual must be following several of the teachings of the Church including attending Sunday meetings, obeying the Church's health code, and paying tithing.

Q: Have you been discriminated against in any way by other members of the Church because you are an immigrant or are Latina?

A: Not from members of the Church, but it (discrimination) has been something that has impacted me negatively a lot. That they...it's hard to describe...because if you don't speak English or you have a certain physical profile...not members of the Church but other people, yes. For example, my husband and I were in Pennsauken- this is confidential, right?- and just because of the physical profile of my husband the police kept following us. They followed us a lot. We were in my daughter's car and when she is driving the police don't follow her, but when my husband drives it they follow him. They watched us stopping and then they just started laughing at us, because it's an old car. They don't usually bother me, but when you are in an old car and you look like my husband does, it's a problem.  
(my translation)

Just as it is important to distinguish between the Church's culture and American culture, it is also important to realize that "immigrants" would be analogous to "converts" and not analogous to lifelong members of the Church who happened to have immigrated to the USA. Although all of the participants in this study are immigrants, not all of them are converts. Both lifelong members of the Church and converts may struggle with acculturation. A lifelong member of the Church can struggle being acculturated into the Church the same way that native born minority populations in the United States might struggle becoming acculturated into the broader American culture.

A useful exercise is to apply Berry's typology of acculturation to members of the Church of Jesus Christ. As a reminder, Berry (1997) identified four strategies of

acculturation for non-dominant cultural groups like immigrants: (1) “Assimilation” refers to a cultural group becoming part of the dominant culture and not preserving their original culture. This approach is often described using the metaphor of a melting pot. (2) “Separation” refers to a cultural group maintaining their original culture, but not becoming part of the dominant culture. (3) “Marginalization” refers to a cultural group not being able to adopt the dominant culture and also not maintaining their original culture. Marginalization is often a result of strong pressures to assimilate but not being accepted when assimilation is attempted. Finally, (4) “integration” refers to a group maintaining its cultural identity but also becoming part of the dominant culture. For integration to happen, the dominant cultural group often needs to change to accept the non-dominant cultural group’s efforts to preserve their original culture. This is often only possible in explicitly multicultural societies.

When converting to Mormonism, successful acculturation would result in converts who participate in the Church in a similar way as practicing lifelong members. The example of the Liberian immigrant who no longer relates well to other Liberian immigrants would be an example of assimilation: he became culturally Mormon and lost his original, non-Mormon culture. He doesn’t relate to the other Liberians who talk during sacrament meeting and don’t seem to know how to act at church. The individual that talked about drawing from both her Filipino culture and the Church’s culture would be an example of integration. Both her culture of origin and the Church’s culture were maintained. The strategies of separation and marginalization are more difficult to spot in my sample, possibly because those who do not develop a LDS culture do not participate in the Church. Several respondents reported periods of inactivity in the Church in which

they had little contact with practicing members, which could be construed an example of a separation strategy of acculturation. They were on the membership rolls of the Church, but they were not living the culture of the Church. Gloria, the individual who was not attending meetings at the time of the interview might be interpreted as an example of marginalization, despite being a lifelong member of the Church. She reported that she still identified as a Latter-day Saint, but that she felt excluded by some practicing members despite efforts to socialize. She tried to practice some aspects of Church culture but was rejected by other Church members.

Among these practicing Latter-day Saints, the most common strategy for acculturation seemed to be a blend of assimilation and integration. In many instances, converts gave up aspects of their culture that conflicted with the Church's culture: drinking alcohol, using profanity, spending their Sundays playing soccer instead of going to church, etc. However, they were also able to keep many aspects of their original culture, and sometimes this was explicitly encouraged by the Church's culture. For example, those attending foreign language units were able to acculturate into the Church's culture while continuing to foster the culture of their countries of origin. Perhaps they rejected some aspects of their culture of origin, like celebrating parties with alcohol. But they also maintained other aspects of their culture of origin like eating ethnic foods, speaking their native language, being more friendly and outgoing than Anglo members of the Church, etc.

In addition to applying theories of acculturation to religious participation, theories of why immigrants choose to migrate in the first place can also be effectively applied to religious participation. A good approach to explaining religious participation is using the

concepts of “push” and “pull” factors (Dube & Rukema, 2013; Eichenlaub, Tolnay, & Trent, 2010). As a reminder, push factors refer to forces that motivate immigrants to leave their countries of origin and pull factors refer to forces that draw immigrants to a new country. In the context of religious participation, a push factor would be one that motivates an individual to abandon a previous religious group or practice and a pull factor would be a force that draws someone to a new religious group. Unlike rational choice theory, this theory does not assume that the costs and benefits of the situation are weighed beforehand, simply that some forces serve to encourage and others to discourage religious participation.

Also, rational choice theory imagines that the individual making the decision is imagining the outcome of the decision and tabulating costs and benefits. Push and pull factors come into play without the outcome needing to be imagined. For example, someone may feel lonely. In rational choice theory, the individual may consider joining a church in order to decrease their loneliness. However, if we view the loneliness as a push factor, what is important is simply that it makes the individual discontent with their current state of affairs. There is no need to imagine that the individual considers joining a church as a solution to their problem; simply that the individual does not like the situation that they are in and may be therefore more inclined to leave it.

The fact that imagining outcomes is unnecessary is advantageous because it makes it unnecessary for respondents to adopt a particular worldview before making their decision. In order to tabulate the costs and benefits of an outcome, you must have a system to assign value to those costs and benefits. However, if the decision is viewed in terms of push and pull factors, you do not need to assign a value. You simply need to

know whether the individual views a stimulus as positive or negative. Rather than trying to maximize their net benefit, they simply end up wherever they are being pushed or pulled to.

Several of the respondents mentioned things that may be considered push or pull factors in their interviews. For example, Johan talked about how he was not content with his life after enduring a brain aneurism, and this led him to search for something that would give him answers to his questions:

I had a brain aneurism, three times. I'm paralyzed, the whole left side of my side. And I somehow, when I was suffering a lot I would sit by myself and do a prayer of my own. Not using the Catholic words, something that comes from my heart. What I am I going to do? Tell me what I'm going to follow? Everyone would say, "thank God you are alive." But I would say, "thanks to what? Look at me! I can do nothing. I have to have people take me to the restroom, shower me, feeding me, everything." I was kind of confused. I was not sure if I was appreciative that [God] let me have a life in this condition or not. I was married and had a young girl, 3 years old. I was watching the TV and saw [an ad] that if you don't have Christmas dinner, call this number. Some very popular community programs, United Way. I called them for a basket and, when I went over there, the person that opened the door for me, for us, was some Elders<sup>12</sup>. I didn't even know what it was the meaning of the word at that time. And what did they do? They asked me, "Can we stop by your place? We want to share with you something." "Sure." I

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<sup>12</sup> Elder is a priesthood office in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, similar to a title like "pastor" or "reverend". Since male missionaries usually have this priesthood office, "Elders" is sometimes used to refer to male missionaries. That is the way this respondent is using the term.

was hungry, starving for something. Whatever comes to make me feel more comfortable. Who can answer my questions? Why do I have to be this way? Why? I'm not a real bad person. I know people who can deserve it but me? Not me. Who can answer me that? Why? Does God love me or not? And when they told me that they can share me some words of God I said, "Well, let's see if they have something different from what I was hearing all these years of my life."

In this example, Johan's health condition could be viewed as a push factor that motivated him to want to leave the worldview that he felt was not giving him the answers he wanted. Rather than imagining costs and benefits of the outcome of inviting the Elders over, the overall tone of his comments gave the sense that he was simply dissatisfied with his current position in life and wanted something different. The Latter-day Saint missionaries happened to be there offering something different when this individual wanted it. In a similar way, a person may feel the need to leave their country of origin because of poor economic conditions and someone who feels spiritually impoverished may feel the need to leave their previous belief system in favor of a new religious tradition.

Participants also mentioned things that made them want to participate more in religion. These things would be examples of pull factors. There were several examples of these in the interviews. Amy mentioned how the unity of the members of the Church in that area appeals to her:

Like the member of the Church when I go there it is like all one family. Nobody picks and chooses. Black, white we are all mingled. So like it's very, I like the Church for that: Unity in the Church. Like everyone we go like we sit with any



white people or everybody. Everybody greets everybody, wanna know how you are doing. So it is very nice. Yeah for unity in the Church. Yeah.

Push factors result from negative conditions in the place/worldview of origin and are clearly distinct from the costs associated with immigrating to a new country or adopting a new worldview. However, pull factors overlap quite a bit with the benefits of religious participation mentioned in the Findings chapter. Both concepts point to positive outcomes associated with making a change in life. The differences between the benefits of rational choice theory and the pull factors of theories in immigration studies are important to identify to avoid confusion about these concepts.

One difference between “benefits” and pull factors is that whereas the value of benefits in rational choice theory need to be compared to the costs, the value of the pull factors does not need to be tabulated. They simply need to be considered positive and be associated with choosing to participate in a religion or immigrating to a new country. Pull factors are not necessarily being compared to anything else, they are simply a draw to a new destination.

A second difference is that pull factors are a broader concept than the concept of benefits. Pull factors can just as easily be a relatively low cost as an actual benefit. For example, one pull factor that may bring immigrants from Mexico to the USA is that the countries are geographically close to each other and consequently it is easier to migrate to the USA from Mexico than it would be to migrate to a country like Japan. When applied to religious participation, a pull factor may be that an individual already has family or friends that belong to the destination religion, so forming social ties in the new religion

may be easier than if the individual were to convert to a religion in which no one they know participates.

Thinking in terms of push and pull factors fits the experiences described by participants in this study much better than rational choice theory in explaining why the respondents in this study chose to participate in Mormonism. It also allows us to strike a balance between agency and determinism if we want to: while the individual is influenced by social forces they use their agency in deciding whether to succumb to the push and pull factors influencing them. Several factors influence a potential immigrant deciding whether or not to embark on the journey to a new country, but in the end the choice to resist or succumb to those factors remains an issue of agency. Likewise, several factors come into play when deciding whether to leave or remain a participant in a particular religion, but in the end the decision to believe in a particular worldview lies with the individual.

Viewing conversion as a process that is very similar to immigration also yields some interesting questions that test the limits of the comparison's usefulness. In what ways are native born citizens like lifelong members of a faith? Immigrants have a moment in which they physically travel from one nation to another, but when does a convert to a religion cross the border from one religious tradition to another? Is it easier to convert to religions that are theologically or culturally similar like it is easier to travel to and from nearby countries? There are many possible useful comparisons for social scientists to explore.

## **Conclusions to Theoretical Implications**

It is possible that, subconsciously or consciously, individuals are choosing to participate in religious organizations based on a rational comparison of costs and benefits. However, a theory of religious participation that is grounded in the experiences of these participants and derived from their worldview would not look like rational choice theory. In addition to not coinciding well with the experiences of the participants in this study, rational choice theory is further limited in that it cannot explain why individuals adopt certain preferences in the first place that would determine the value of the different costs and benefits of religious participation.

The findings from this study suggest that being part of a religious group is more like living in a culture than like a financial transaction. Consequently, a more useful approach is to rely on the similarities between being part of a religion and being a citizen of a country. Both require acculturation, reassigning social ties, learning behaviors and possibly language, and often impact individuals over an entire lifetime. Viewing religious participation this way allows the social scientist to draw inspiration for theories of religious participation from the literature on the more observable phenomenon of immigration and acculturation. The benefits of using theories derived from immigration studies are that they align with narratives of immigration found in religious texts and consequently with how many religious individuals think of their religious participation; they help explain how individuals choose to adopt a religious worldview (which is beyond the scope of rational choice theory); and they open up new avenues of study for social scientists interested in studying religious participation.

While viewing religious participation as similar to enacting a certain culture could certainly be very useful, religious participation is a unique social phenomenon. Future research should focus on clarifying the utility of the analogy comparing religious participation to living in a country. Qualitative research focusing on individuals from different religious traditions and belief systems should test to see if the analogy can be expanded beyond Mormonism and clarify how individuals who are not religious view their decision to not participate. This analogy should also be tested on non-immigrant populations to determine if they view religious participation differently. Eventually, “push” and “pull” factors that are common across religious traditions and populations could be identified and possibly quantified, thereby shedding light on the question of why individuals choose to convert to a religious tradition or remain in the one that they are in.

## Conclusions

While I was living in the Philadelphia area I once sat in a Sunday school lesson in which the teacher, who was a refugee from Liberia, described an incident during one of Liberia's civil wars in which he had seen a man get killed by someone who drove a metal spike through the victim's head. It was easy for me to understand why this teacher had decided to leave Liberia. The teacher's decision was completely rational. And yet, to talk about the decision as a rational calculation of costs versus benefits feels almost ludicrous because there is almost no possible scenario in which the benefits of staying in a war zone as a civilian outweigh the costs. How much would someone have to pay another in order to make living in a war zone worthwhile?

For the individuals interviewed for this study, the decision to participate in Mormonism resulted from a similar calculation. Several of them had experienced what they believed to be divine intervention in their lives leading them to participate in the Church and believed that the Church's teachings were true. Consequently, there is almost no possible scenario in which the costs of participation could outweigh the benefits. How much would someone have to pay you to make disobeying God worthwhile? Or, what cost could outweigh an eternity of happiness after death?

Many scholars of religion analyze religious participation through the lens of economic theories derived from rational choice theory. Religious participation certainly can be viewed that way because there are both benefits and costs to religious participation. However, rational choice theory cannot explain how people come to believe in a certain religion in the first place and neglects the fact that many religious adherents don't think about their religious participation as a calculation of costs versus

benefits. Rational choice theory works in many cases, but it does not reflect how many religious individuals think about their participation.

Using grounded theory methods, this study showed that the plurality of interviewees participated in Mormonism simply because it was true or they believed that God told them to. In addition, others pointed to benefits in the afterlife that presupposed the truthfulness of Mormonism. Still others pointed to emotional benefits they believed came from God, which would imply that they believed that Mormonism's claims were true. These individuals viewed the world through the lens of Mormonism because they felt it gave them a more accurate image of the way the world truly is.

How did they arrive at this belief that Mormonism was true? Many described forces that pushed them towards Mormonism. Some were born into the faith, some described spiritual experiences, some described forces that pushed them away from old belief systems and Mormonism addressed the problems they had with their old belief systems. Many mentioned a combination of these experiences.

For example, Louisa described growing up not feeling that the faith she was raised in was "enough." Eventually she married a man who was Mormon. However, she didn't convert until she had a dream that she feels was sent from God that showed her the missionary who would teach her and an image of the Mormon temple in Salt Lake City. When she visited her husband's church and recognized the missionary from her dream, she decided to take the missionary lessons and convert.

Over the course of the interviews, I noticed that some of the respondents described Mormonism as a culture and that the dynamics of participating in a religion were often similar to the dynamics of immigrating to a new country. Just like immigrants,

converts needed to establish new social networks, learn new customs and traditions, and become acculturated. In addition I was aware of several religious and secular narratives connecting religion to nationality and the concept of immigration.

Over the course of writing this dissertation, I have come to the conclusion that participating in a religion is much more like being a citizen of a country than it is like an economic transaction. Like citizenship, religious participation implies following certain laws and fulfilling certain duties. Both religious affiliation and citizenship create a sense of community and have an enduring impact on a person's identity. And just like being a citizen of a country allows access to a country's national safety net, religions provide their own informal and formal safety nets for adherents. Consequently, theories derived from the study of immigration and citizenship are more likely to explain religious participation than theories derived from the study of economics.

The benefits received by participants in this study that were provided by this religious safety net included help immigrating to the United States, economic benefits, friendships, emotional benefits, and otherworldly benefits. The obligations and costs involved in religious participation included social conflict and strained relationships as well as exposure to discrimination. Theoretically, committing to obeying Church teachings and paying tithing could also be seen as costs or obligations for religious citizenship, but participants did not describe those things as costs or negative.

Immigrants to the United States are more numerous now than they have ever been before. Issues surrounding immigration have presented challenges to federal, state, and local governments that, so far, they have not been able to solve. For some immigrants,

part of the solution for the issues that they face comes through religious participation and the benefits and community they obtain through that participation.

Recall the story of Elba described in the introduction. Religious participation gave Elba and her family a way to support themselves after fleeing El Salvador's civil war. Despite the fact that there were few, if any, other El Salvadorian families in the small Nebraska town where Elba settled, there were other Mormons. Elba was not an outcast because she had a community: a religious community where she was looked at as a fellow citizen.

The religious beliefs of these immigrants also gave most of them a community and a sense of belonging in their new homeland. For most, even though they were considered foreigners in the United States, they were considered fellow citizens in the Church. They were able to receive all of the benefits of citizenship and they also paid the costs of participation. Perhaps most importantly, for these participants, their religion was as fundamental to their identity as their nationality. Describing religious participation in economic terms glosses over the fact that religion is fundamental to how these individuals see themselves.

Future research should view religious participation as something fundamental to the identity of adherents, similarly to the way someone's nationality is fundamental to their identity. Researchers can draw inspiration from literature on immigration. Scholars who study religion and immigration, as well as practitioners working with immigrant or religious clients, should view also religious participation as a potential resource individuals can turn to in order to fulfill their needs and wants. Understanding the dynamics of how religious individuals access resources through their religious



participation can help practitioners and researchers find ways to get individuals what they need while minimizing that individual's exposure to potentially negative outcomes.

Knowing about and accepting the religious culture of individuals can allow practitioners and researchers to better help those we work with.

## Appendix-Interview guide

Date of interview \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_

### Immigration Qualitative interview protocol

Is it alright if I record this interview?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of Latter-day Saint immigrants and explore why they choose to participate in the Church.

Your participation in this study is confidential. I won't share your name or identifying information with the LDS Church, the government, or anyone. If quotes from this interview become published, I will change all of the names so that you cannot be identified by others.

Ok, let's begin.

#### **Are you an immigrant to the United States?**

(if applicable) Could you give me a brief history of how and why you immigrated to the United States?

What country were you born in?

How old were you when you immigrated?

How long have you lived in the USA?

Has being a member of the Church helped or hurt you at all during the immigration process?

(if applicable) May I ask what your current immigration status is? (Green card, temporary visa, refugee, undocumented, etc.?)

#### **Could you give me a brief history of your involvement in the LDS Church?**

Did you grow up in the church?

(if convert) What brought you into the church?

How long have you been participating in the Church?

Have you ever been inactive or not participating in Church services?

Has your participation in the Church changed as you have lived in different places?

(if immigrant) Were you baptized in the United States?

**Why do you choose to participate in the church?**

How has participating in the Church impacted your life?

How would your life be different if you weren't a member of the church?

(if a convert or reactivated) Comparing your life from when you weren't participating in the church to your life after, what have been the differences from participating in the Church?

If you lived somewhere else, do you think that you would still be religious? Why or why not?

Would your religious participation change if you were at a different stage in life?

(if a lifelong member or a childhood convert) What was it like being a member of the church while you were growing up?

**When you do things in the Church, do you think about how participating in the Church benefits you? Do you think about how it makes life harder for you?**

What would you describe as the benefits to participating in the church?

What are the drawbacks to participating in the church?

*Now I am going to ask you about specific areas in your life where being a member of the Church might have impacted you.*

**First let's talk about spirituality, how has participating in the church impacted your level of spirituality?**

Does participating in the Church impact what you expect will happen to you after you die?

Does being a member of the LDS Church impact you during difficult times in your life? How so?

On a spiritual level, what have been the benefits or drawbacks of being a member of the Church?

**How does participating in the Church impact your social life?**

Are most of your friends members of the church? Is everyone in your family a member?

Have you made or lost friends because of your membership in the Church?

(if married) Did you meet your spouse through the Church?

(if convert or reactivated) Did a friend or family member help persuade you to participate more in the church?

Have you developed any social skills from participating in the Church?

Has being a member of the LDS Church exposed you to any sort of discrimination? (From the broader society or from within the church) (religious, racial, sexism, heterosexism, etc.)

With regard to your social life, what would you say are the benefits and drawbacks of participating in the Church, if any?

**How does participating in the Church impact your family life?**

Has it benefitted or hurt your relationship with family members? What about family members who aren't Latter-day Saints?

(if they have children) Does it help you as you raise your children or make raising children more difficult?

What would you describe as the benefits and drawbacks of participating in the church on your family life?

**How does participating in the church impact your involvement in your community?**

Does it help you fit in better with your community?

Does it make you stand out? In a positive or a negative way?

Do you perceive the church's impact on your involvement in your community as beneficial or costly to you personally?

**Does participating in the church impact how you relate to your cultural heritage?**

How would you describe the culture you grew up in?

Do you consider Mormonism to be a part of your culture?

Do you participate in cultural events sponsored through the church?

Do other people who attend your congregation share a similar cultural identity with you? Do you feel that this benefits or costs you in any way?

**How does participating in the Church impact your health?**

Have you ever received help from the Church in overcoming an addiction? How did the Church help you?

Do you feel like the Church's health code, the Word of Wisdom, has benefitted or cost you in your life?

Has participating in the Church negatively impacted your health in any way?

Do the church's teachings help you during difficult times?

**How has participating in the Church impacted your emotional well-being?**

Has being a member of the church impacted the level of stress you experience?

Has being a member of the church impacted your outlook on life? Has it made you more or less satisfied with your life?

Has being a member of the church impacted how happy or sad you are?

Does being a member of the church give you a sense of purpose or meaning?

**Has participating in the Church impacted your education?**

Did you attend a Church-sponsored university?

Have you learned any skills by participating in the Church? A foreign language?  
Organizational skills?

Has participating in the Church hindered your education in any way?

Churches do a lot of teaching both at church and at activities during the week.

Have you benefitted from any of the classes done through your church?

**How has participating in the LDS Church impacted your financial well-being?**

How have Church teachings or policies about tithing or donations impacted you?

Have you ever received help finding a job through the church?

Have you ever received any informal financial help from being a member of the church? What about things like meals or help moving?

Have you ever received any formal help from the Bishop or the Church Welfare program?

Are there financial benefits or drawbacks to being a member of the church?

**Considering your individual situation in life, can you think of any other benefits or drawbacks to participating in the Church?**

**Thinking about all the things we've talked about since we began, what most affects your decision to continue participating in the Church?**

**Thank you!!!**

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