Church Planting in Mormon Country

Matthew D. Ortega
Senior Pastor, Lighthouse Baptist Church—Eagle Mountain, Utah

I. The State of Utah

A. Founding of Utah
   1. Mormon pioneers escaping ‘persecution’ and searching for a religious sanctuary arrived in Utah in 1847.
   2. Admitted to statehood in 1896, after the LDS Church finally agreed to ban polygamy.

B. Demographics of the State of Utah
   1. Utah is the 4th fastest growing state in the country. Population is just under 3 million people, two-thirds of which reside within a 45 mile stretch.
   2. 81% Caucasian with the next largest ethnic group being Hispanics at 13%.
   3. 67%, roughly 2 million of the state’s population claim affiliation with Mormonism.
   4. It is a mission field with statistics comparable to those of countries in the 10/40 Window; only 1 percent of the population in this mission field attends an evangelical church—about the same percentage as Thailand or Morocco.

C. Demographics of Utah County
   1. Northern Utah County is the fastest growing area in the state. Since 2000, the population has increased 41%, from 368K to 520K.
   2. 85% Caucasian with the next largest ethnic group being Hispanics at 11%.
   3. There are 334 churches in Utah County, 297 are Mormon (89%). There are 6 Baptist churches.

II. The Mormon Church

A. History
   1. The official name of the Mormon Church today is, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”
2. Joseph Smith founded it at the age of 24, in the state of New York on April 6, 1830, after he was visited by God the Father and Jesus Christ.

3. It was originally named the Church of Christ, and then in 1834, the name was changed to the Church of the Latter Day Saints. In 1838, it received its current name, **Doctrine & Covenants 115:4**.

4. The LDS Church claims to have the only true priesthood that is required to act in the name of God. A Prophet/President and his two counselors govern the church. Under them are twelve apostles and a group of men called the Seventy. These are the highest offices in their church.

5. It claims to be a divine restoration of Christ's true church. It therefore rejects the validity of any other church. Joseph Smith proclaimed that God Himself had designated the LDS Church as “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth”, **Doctrine & Covenants 1:30**.

B. **Statistics**
   1. Total Church Membership: 14,131,467 as of 2010, according to the LDS, Dec. 31, 2010, statistical report.
   
   
   3. Full-time Missionaries: 52,225.
   
   4. As of December 31, 2010, there were 2,896 stakes, 340 missions, 614 districts, and 28,660 wards and branches.
   
   
   6. The estimated grand total of LDS assets, by a conservative reckoning, would be well over $25-30 billion.
   
   7. Membership tithing brings in offerings of approximately $5.3 billion a year.

III. **Basic Tenants of Mormonism**

   A. Mormons believe in ongoing revelation: The President of Mormonism is considered to be a modern day prophet, *Gospel Principles* pp. 51-52.

   B. Mormons have five authoritative sources.

   1. Their modern day Prophet: The current president of the Mormon Church is Thomas S. Monson. He is the 16th President, (9th article of faith).
2. The Book of Mormon: A history of Christ’s visit to the Americas, (8th article of faith).

3. The Pearl of Great Price: This is a compilation of writings and articles important to the Mormon faith. The Pearl of Great Price includes a portion of the history of Joseph Smith.

4. Doctrine and Covenants: Doctrine and Covenants consists of regulations given through modern day prophets.

5. The King James Bible, although it is insufficient and corrupted, *History of the Church*, v. 1, p. 245.

C. The Jesus of Mormonism


2. Created Being: Jesus, according to Mormon doctrine, is literally our elder brother, born to Heavenly Parents in the Pre-existence. Jesus, Lucifer, angels and humans are all the same species and are brothers and sisters, (*Gospel Principles*, p. 11, 17, 18; Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, p. 466, 472; Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 742).

3. Married: Jesus was a polygamist who was married and his wives were Mary, Martha, and Mary Magdalene, (Apostle Orson Hyde, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 4, pages 259-260; *Doctrine & Covenants 132:17-32*).

4. Progressed to godhood: The Jesus of Mormonism became a god. The only way to the state of godhood for anyone is via the path of exultation, (*Doctrine & Covenants 132:20-24*; LDS Conference Report, October 1949, p. 69).

D. Salvation According to Mormonism

1. ‘Salvation’ occurred at Gethsemane. Mormons object to the use of a cross on their buildings and the wearing of the cross, (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p.555).

3. Salvation: There are three types of salvation, unconditional, conditional, and exaltation.
   a. “Unconditional or general salvation, that which comes by grace alone without obedience to gospel law, consists in the mere fact of being resurrected. In this sense salvation is synonymous with immortality; it is the inseparable connection of body and spirit so that the resurrected personage lives forever. This kind of salvation eventually will come to all mankind, excepting only the sons of perdition.”

   b. “Conditional or individual salvation, that which comes by grace coupled with gospel obedience, consists in receiving an inheritance in the celestial kingdom of God. This kind of salvation is not salvation by grace alone. Rather, it is salvation by grace coupled with obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel,” Doctrine & Covenants 20:29; 2 Ne. 9:23-24.

   c. Full salvation in its true and full meaning is synonymous with exaltation or eternal life and consists in gaining an inheritance in the highest of the three heavens within the celestial kingdom, Doctrine & Covenants 131:1-4; 132:19-55.

4. Its chief aim is self-glorification and self-gratification. The LDS scriptures declare that the ultimate goal of a Mormon is to become a god and procreate for all eternity, (LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, p. 64; Doctrine & Covenants 132:18-22).

5. Salvation is made available to those who die without accepting Mormonism through the vicarious works of the living- baptisms for the dead, (Doctrine of Salvation, Vol. II, p. 135; Talmage, Articles of Faith, p. 152).

IV. The Culture of Mormonism

A. Church is the center of Mormon life.
   2. Weekly visits from visiting teachers.
   3. Monday family home evening.
   5. Baptisms for the dead.
   6. Seminary training, middle school & high school.
   7. Church Social activities abound: youth dances, camps, retreats.
   8. Missionary service of 2 years.

B. Family
   1. Families are large.
a. High birthrates have been an important source of growth throughout LDS history; there were 120,528 new children of record in the Church in 2010.

b. In an effort to depopulate the spirit world and allow other spirits the opportunity to prove their selves, women must reproduce.

2. Families are forever: The most attractive and most touted concept of the LDS faith is that through rituals only available in their temples, married couples and their children can be together forever, *Gospel Principles* p. 209, 2009 ed.

C. Close knit communities & fishbowl living:
   1. Neighborhoods are divided into wards. Everyone in your ward is appointed the same time and location to attend.
   2. Accountability is high; members have teachers that regularly visit them in the home. These teachers are assigned to “watch over them, strengthen them, and teach them.”
   3. Same school, same recreational sports teams, same Boy Scout’s group, same Young Women’s group (similar to Girl’s Scouts).
   4. Neighborhood activities are frequent: BBQ’s, Thanksgiving Football, camping, shooting…

D. The culture of Mormonism makes it very hard for people to leave the church. If they do leave Mormonism they can expect ostracism and abandonment.

V. Challenges

A. Language Barrier: Mormons use the standard vocabulary of Christianity but with radically different definitions. Terminology must be defined when witnessing to Mormons.


3. Eternal life: Exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom; godhood and ability to bear children in heaven. Must have a temple recommend and be sealed in the Mormon temple, *Doctrine & Covenants* 131:1-4; 132.

4. Heaven: Heaven is divided into three kingdoms: Celestial, Terrestrial and Telestial. Almost everyone will be resurrected to one of these places, *Doctrine & Covenants* 88:16-20.

B. Mormons are not generally open to spiritual discussions.

1. They are not allowed to affiliate with any group or individual whose teachings or practices are contrary to or oppose those accepted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

2. They are not allowed to question their faith.

C. Because the Christian population is small, many “Christians” tend to look for churches that have a ‘larger’ youth ministry rather than a sound teaching and preaching ministry.

D. With smaller congregations, few churches in the state are self-supporting.

E. Utah is transitory for non-Mormons.

VI. **Practical Advice for Church Planting in Mormon Country**

A. Obtain a seminary education from DBTS.

B. Be sold on the doctrine of bibliology.

C. Be mentally prepared.

D. Anticipate being on “missionary status” for a while.

E. Major in something other than Bible in your undergraduate studies.

F. Be prepared to homeschool.

VII. **Must Have Resources**

A. *Is the Mormon My Brother?* by James White

B. *Mormon Doctrine* by Bruce McConkie

C. A “Triple.” This is one volume consisting of *The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*.

D. *Mormonism* by Anthony A. Hoekema