

**LEADS “The Journey of a People”**  
**Facilitator – Mark A. Scherer, World Church Historian (Ret.)**  
**May 3-4, 2019**  
Camp Bountiful  
Bountiful Mission Center  
Syllabus

**T**he Community of Christ journey can be divided into three main eras: The Era of Restoration (1820-1844), The Era of Reorganization (1844-1946), and the Era of Worldwide Community (1946-present.) Using the three-volume *Journey of a People* as an information source we will chart our course using this three-era paradigm as our road map. Far more than just a rote recitation of names, facts, and dates, our mission is to discover our institutional identity as well as our personal identity as travelers on this journey. We will learn a lot about institution and about ourselves.

So often the ancient Athenians got things right, after all, they invented the word “history.” Their Greek word is  $\text{HISTOP}\Psi$  transliterated as “history.” They understood the term to mean “to ask questions.” This understanding commissions students of the historical discipline in their task. Therefore, we will ask questions. Let us affirm to each other right now that asking questions does not suggest we are questioning our faith. We will not fall prey to that unfortunate judgmental misunderstanding that questioning is doubting, but instead its exploring. Also, I do not anticipate seminar participants to emerge from our weekend with a doctoral degree in history. Instead this will be an interactive learning experience. Our time will be laced with lively discussions, colorful PowerPoints well-grounded in the most current scholarship, and wonderful insights. This is gonna be fun!

**H**istory is the story of people interacting in the context of their times; this holds especially true with our church story. There will be abundant heart-warming stories of a committed people that will affirm our direction and quicken our step, but every road has potholes that are unavoidable and must needs be vaulted together. We will help each other across them.

In our opening discussion we must address that curious relationship between history and faith. Historical fact can be a powerful confirmation of our faith beliefs. These facts certainly bolster my faith. But how do we react when we discover that “faithful is different from truthful.” Some prefer to simply look away in disbelief of the faith-interrupting fact. It will be important for us to remind ourselves that we place our true faith in a carpenter from Nazareth and not a prophet from Palmyra. But please understand that this takes nothing away from the prophet’s enormous contribution (it’s doubtful we would even be here without him.) Rather we will put in historical perspective what we know of the prophet’s thoughts and actions. To further explore this, consider the opening statement on page 10 of *Journey of a People I*. Read it and let’s discuss it!

**Y**ou may trust that this will not be a class intended to parade institutional “dirty laundry” but nor will we “sugar coat” our trek. To do so would create a false identity and totally defeat our purpose. To live a false identity is to live falsely. I must rely on your reading the chapters in *Journey I*. Of course I will be happy to explain where needed but it will be impossible to cover in detail every event we discuss. In sum, this will be a journey of inspirational learning that will hopefully lead to a clearer understanding of who we are today as a people and where our path is taking us in the future. And along the way will be the wonderful discovery of the liberating power of truth affirmed by the author of John 8:32 who wrote “ye are my disciples indeed; ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

## **Friday Evening, May 3<sup>rd</sup> (7:30-9:00pm)**

Orientation, Introduction, Class Expectations, and Course Review.

CHURCH HISTORY PRINCIPLES: How can the nine church history principles shared by the First Presidency in the *Herald* in October 2008, help us in the discovery process of studying our church story?

CHAPTER ONE: What is the proper relationship between the disciplines of history and faith? Why must we implement “historical imagination?” Conclusions drawn by historians suggest that all written history is temporary and has a shelf life (including *Journey*.) Will anything ever replace Inez Smith Davis’s *Story of the Church*, first published in 1934? Were there any significant historical events that occurred after 1934, or did our history just stop on December 31<sup>st</sup> at midnight? How do we respond to that well-intentioned, but simply uninformed dear friend sitting next to you in the Sunday School class who draws an antiquated conclusion? How do we ensure that “historical deconstruction” is followed immediately by “historical reconstruction?” What are the hazards of canonizing our church history? List the six key realities in understanding the historical process. Where are you on the faith-facts continuum?

CHAPTER TWO: Here is a thought exercise: place your great, great, great, great grandfather from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in a time machine and send him forward to the present day. How would you explain to him who you are today? What would you share about our times? Now climb into his time machine and set the dial for early 19<sup>th</sup> century America. What questions would you ask in order to understand his times?

READINGS: “Church History Principles” by President Steve Veazey; *Journey of a People I*: Chapter One: “The Curious Relationship between History and Faith”; Chapter Two: “The Early Nineteenth-Century Social Context”

## **Saturday Morning, May 4<sup>th</sup> (9:00-10:30am)**

CHAPTER THREE: Early Joseph Smith genealogy finds his ancestry participating in some important events in American history. Provide examples. What difficult experiences shaped the worldview of the young lad in his remarkable early development? How did early nineteenth century climatology directly impact Community of Christ history? What are the psychological implications emanating from the fact that Joseph Smith Jr. was a “middle child?” Are you a middle child?

CHAPTER FOUR: Joseph Smith Jr.’s four-stage religious conversion was stereotypical during his times (see pages 51-52). So was his Sacred Grove epiphany. Today we look to that epiphany as foundational to our faith identity. What was the immediate impact of Joseph Smith Jr.’s divine encounter on his family farm in Manchester, New York? Even after church organization, how well-known was the experience? When did followers first find out about it? The young man’s explanation of the detail of the divine encounter is confused and even in conflict. Study pages 62-63. Should this be problematic? Now that we have deconstructed the First Vision, so let us reconstruct it. (As Juliet Capulet told Romeo Montague, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene II)

CHAPTER FIVE: In many ways Joseph Smith Jr. was a product of his culture. Should it be surprising then that he espoused at least in part a magical worldview if such beliefs were powerful and prevalent? Does it make a difference that he was a treasure hunter and claimed to have “seeing abilities?” Can such enchantment be found in the modern day? Give examples. Historical lesson: Let us not be judgmental.

READINGS: Chapter Three: “Early Smith Family History”; Chapter Four: “The First Vision and Its Impact”; Chapter Five: Enchantment Influences in Joseph Smith’s America.”

## **Saturday Morning, May 4<sup>th</sup> (10:45-12:15pm)**

CHAPTER SIX: This chapter is intended to present a balanced view between believers and non-believers of the Book of Mormon. With the Book of Mormon Joseph Smith Jr. Americanized the Judeo-Christian tradition. The book now stands as one of our three canonized scriptures. As with any book of scripture there are so many questions. When did the traditional understanding of the Book of Mormon story first emerge and how does it weigh with modern historical and scientific understanding? For early Mormon missionaries this scripture was their most effective missionary tool to baptize Gentiles (Anglo-Americans) even though the writing was intended first for Native Americans. What happened to reverse that? What is the difference between “first sight” and “second sight?” Joseph Smith Jr. was neither the first nor the last to connect the Native American with the Middle Eastern Holy Land, but he was the first to canonize the story. This was the great attraction and explains much about Latter Day Saintism’s early popularity and longevity. His followers believed they lived in an American Holy Land and the Book of Mormon was that sacred story.

All familiar with this book of scripture find themselves on a Spectrum of Opinion between two polar viewpoints. Some aspects of the Book of Mormon story are easy to believe while others more than stretch the imagination. For example, because of its testimony of Jesus Christ, for millions this scripture has withstood the test of time. Most importantly, none of the witnesses denied their testimony. Others have questioned the authenticity of its discovery and translation. What does physical science and the Periodic Table of Elements contribute to understanding recovery of the Book of Mormon plates? Do modern-day scientific DNA studies impact the Book of Mormon story? Did Nephi’s younger brother Jacob, who was a caretaker and author of an important segment of the Book of Mormon, know how to speak French (Jacob 7:27)? For Book of Mormon literalists what are the implications?

READINGS: Chapter Six: “The Book of Mormon Story”

## **Saturday Afternoon, May 4<sup>th</sup> (1:15-2:45pm)**

CHAPTER SEVEN: So much of the detail of our church foundation is “faith-understood.” Minor historical details can have a major impact on understanding accurately this important episode in the church story and is sufficiently important to dedicate an entire chapter to clarify. In Chapter Seven seeming minutiae challenges us to analyze our long-standing tradition of where and when Latter Day Saintism received its institutional birth. Much is factually sustained some is not. Indeed, it’s physically impossible to be in two places at the same time. What is a more accurate understanding of the formational meeting? Should we attempt to change the tradition held for many generations?

READINGS: Chapter Seven: “Organizing the Church”

## **Saturday Afternoon, May 4<sup>th</sup> (3:00-4:30pm)**

At this juncture our class moves into the Middle Period of the Restoration where we will conclude our seminar this weekend. The two foci are the Kirtland, Ohio, and Independence, Missouri, experiences. As with a good “cliff-hanger” novel we will only get half way through the full story here. So as with Paul Harvey we must wait to get “the rest of the story.” Or you can read ahead (which is fine.)

The Kirtland House of the Lord (Temple) today stands as an iconic structure that communicates the spirituality and sacrifice of our founding generation. After the Lamanite missionaries made connections, leadership intended for Kirtland Mills to be somewhat of a launching location for the Saints heading for Zion to receive their inheritances once Independence was determined to have that honor. But events caused Kirtland to play a

much larger and lasting role. Therefore, the direct connections between Kirtland and Independence cannot be overstated. Kirtland was the stronghold and Independence was the destination. Thus, we study these two chapters together.

**CHAPTER EIGHT:** Of all the places, why Kirtland Mills in “the Ohio”? What are the four architectural styles used in the design of the House of the Lord? To a first-time visitor what message is communicated? Issues of ecclesiastical structure and stewardship philosophy emerged during the early Kirtland days. Please explain. What were the three key purposes of the House of the Lord? Independence Temple today? The House of the Lord was the venue for the most significant worship services in the entire Restoration Era. These Pentecostal services lasted over a period of two weeks. What made them so special? A truly remarkable aspect of Joseph Smith Jr.’s early personal commitment to non-violence occurred in March 1832, at the John Johnson farm in Hiram, Ohio. Before Kirtland, there was no guarantee that Latter Day Saintism would survive as a religious movement. But after Kirtland, its permanency was relatively secured. How so?

**CHAPTER NINE:** Many important lessons of community can be learned from the experiences of church followers between 1831 and 1833 in Independence, Jackson County, Missouri. These lessons can be applied today. What is the heavy price of exclusionary theology and failure to communicate? Independence was the most sacred of all sacred spaces for early Mormons. As determined by Joseph Smith Jr. not only did the area have salvific New Testament implications for the Second Coming, but also the area played a key role in Old Testament events, as well. Is this classic Americanization or what?

**READINGS:** Chapter Eight: “The Church in Kirtland, Ohio: Early Stronghold of Latter Day Saintism”; Chapter Nine: “Establishing the Church in Zion.”

### **Saturday Afternoon, (4:45-6:00pm)**

Most recently some have argued that we have been a “peace church” from our birth. This may be more wishful thinking of “presentism” than of historical reality. Early Latter Day Saints were constant victims of frontier vigilantism. Acts of brutality such as tar and feathering, physical beatings, midnight raids of farm houses, burned crops, confiscations, and lives lost have left a lasting impact on our religious movement. Some even were acts of state-sponsored terrorism. Having had enough, Joseph Smith Jr. responded with revelatory sanction offering holy protection for revenge. There were many occasions. Such was the case with the Zion’s Camp March in spring 1834. Compare and contrast the language of Doctrine and Covenants Sections 100 and 102. How far does one go when told to “liberate Zion” in God’s name? What would happen to the Saints’ inheritance in Zion if the Holy City was not freed? When Missouri Governor Daniel Dunklin denied redress of grievances the invasion went forward across Missouri. The Mormon “Army of the Lord” went from a defensive posture to an offensive one. From that moment forward the Zion’s Camp was an unlawful, invading army. The Fishing River revelation saved hundreds of lives. This was just one of the military engagements of the inflamed Mormon War in northern Missouri lasting from 1834-1838. For good reason or poor, Latter Day Saintism was not a peace church during this era.

**COURSE REVIEW:** What are your observations considering the information that we have covered during our time together? Surprises? Confirmations? Did you discover the meaning of John 8:32?

**READINGS:** Chapter Ten: “Redeeming Zion.”