Brothers and sisters, since the sesquicentennial anniversary in 1997, there has been a dramatic increase worldwide in inquiries about the Church. This growing interest is fueled by our rapid growth, by events like the Winter Olympics here in Salt Lake City, and by the prominence in their chosen professions of many of our individual members. I am sure that these questions come not only to the Church but to you as individual members. It is not easy to explain something as vast as the Church or as wonderful as the restored gospel to people who know little or nothing about us. Even questions on one specific aspect can be difficult to answer because every question seems to be connected to other questions. The most common request we hear is a fairly simple one that goes something like this: “Tell me a little about your Church.” The key word here is “little.” They are not saying, “Tell me everything you know and then send others to tell me everything else.”

We, of course, welcome people’s interest, and many will want to be taught more about our doctrines and beliefs. This is why we have over 53,000 full-time missionaries serving at their own expense throughout the world. But we need to remember that there is a difference between interest and mere curiosity. Sometimes people just want to know what the Church is. Those who are curious in this general way deserve clear and accurate information that comes directly from those of us who are members so that they do not have to rely on the incomplete answers, half-truths, or false statements that may come from the media or other outside voices. The many misunderstandings and false information about the Church are somewhat our own fault for not clearly explaining who we are and what we believe.

The Public Affairs Committee, on which I serve, has learned that there is a great need for clear, simple statements that present those who are curious with the basics about the Church as it is today. Let me share with you some of the things we have found to be helpful. You may want to prepare your own list of talking points that will assist you in explaining what we believe to your friends and acquaintances of other faiths. It may be helpful for you, as it is for me, to have on one page a few facts about the Church as it is today to give to them along with a copy of the Articles of Faith.

Here are four subjects that will help someone today to gain a basic understanding of the Church. Under each of the four headings, there are some simple statements I have found helpful. Try to imagine them being heard or read by a person who knows virtually nothing about us. The four main subjects deal with facts, faith, families, and fruits of the restored gospel.

Facts

Some facts might include:

• First, “Mormon” is a nickname for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Members are often referred to as “Mormons,” “Latter-day Saints,” or “LDS.” The term “Saint” means “member.”

• Second, the Church was restored in 1830 in upstate New York with Joseph Smith as its first prophet and president. Today it is headquartered in Salt Lake City, with President Gordon B. Hinckley as the present prophet.

• Third, there are now over 13 million members in 176 countries and territories. About 6 million of these are in the United States, making us the fourth largest Christian denomination in America. As one of the fastest growing Christian faiths in the
world, we complete a new chapel
every working day. Members pay a
tithe, which is 10 percent of their
income, making this and other pro-
gams possible.

• Fourth, local congregations are
led by volunteer, unpaid members.
Both men and women serve in
assigned leadership positions.

• And fifth, Mormons are well rep-
resented in politics and government.
(In the United States, for example,
there are 16 members in Congress,
from both political parties.) Members
also serve in high and trusted posi-
tions throughout the world in busi-
ness, medicine, law, education, media,
ports, and entertainment.

Faith

Next, people need to know some-
thing of our faith as committed
Christians with strong traditional val-
ues. Along with the Articles of Faith
we need to emphasize that:

• We believe in the eternity of the
soul, that God is the Father of our
spirits, and that we can return to Him
after death.

• We believe that Jesus Christ is our
personal Savior, and we try to model
our lives after Him and His teachings.
We commemorate Christ’s atoning sac-
ifice in our Sunday worship services,
similar to taking communion in
other churches. We accept as fellow
Christians all who believe Jesus Christ
to be the Son of God and the Savior of
all mankind. Many Christians do not
understand that we have much com-
mon ground with them. Joseph Smith
taught that Jesus Christ is the core of
our belief, and everything else is an
appendage to it (see Elders’ Journal,
July 1838, 44). The name of the
Church is The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints.

• Mormons place particularly
strong emphasis on family as the basic
unit of the Church and of society. We
have a deep commitment to marriage
(defined as a union between one man
and one woman). Polygamy, a limited
practice in the early pioneer days
of the Church, was discontinued in
1890, some 117 years ago.

• Families and individuals, whether
members of our faith or not, can
attend Sunday services in our chapels.
Here we worship together, instructing
one another from the scriptures.

• Latter-day Saint families are
encouraged to hold family home
evenings weekly, usually on Monday
nights. This provides a regular and
predictable time for parents to teach
values to their children and to have
fun together. We invite those not of
our faith to adopt this practice with
their own families.

• The Church has auxiliary pro-
gams for women, youth, and chil-
dren as a support to the family. These
programs provide such things as reli-
gious instruction, opportunities for
Christian service, sports, drama,
music, and Scouting.

• And there is also much focus on
extended family, genealogy, and per-
sonal family history, providing young
and old with a stronger sense of
roots, identity, and belonging. The
highest and most sacred ordinances
of our faith relate to our families, both
living and dead, and some of these
ordinances take place in our temples.

Fruits

Now, even as someone begins to
understand a few facts about us and
comes to know us more accurately
by our faith and the importance
of family, it was the Savior who said “by
their fruits ye shall know them”
(Matthew 7:20; emphasis added). A
church, or any way of life, should be
judged by the fruits or the results that
it generates. Here are a few examples
based on United States statistics. But
these would be similar throughout
the world among practicing Mormons
(by which we mean those who attend
church and the temple regularly):

• One of the fruits is a longer
life. Studies show that practicing
Mormons are healthier and therefore
live longer than the national average.
In 1833 the Lord revealed to Joseph
Smith the Word of Wisdom, which is
the way to live in order to enjoy a long and healthy life.

- Second, those who are married in and attend the temple regularly have a divorce rate far below the national and world average.
- Third, we achieve an educational level that is higher than the national average.
- Fourth, over 70,000 members volunteer at their own expense to serve for 18 to 24 months in humanitarian efforts, Church service assignments, and full-time missionary service throughout the world.
- And fifth, we place strong emphasis on self-reliance and a solid work ethic. We encourage active involvement in our communities and in providing service to others. The Church continues to donate substantial money, goods, and services to humanitarian causes around the globe, including untold hours of labor donated by members to assist in disaster cleanup and relief.

Brothers and sisters, in today’s busy world, I have found that most people will not read or focus on more than just a few important facts at one time. Whatever you choose to use to inform your friends and acquaintances about the Church, write it down, check it for accuracy, and keep it simple and short.

The growing prominence of the Church and the increasing inquiries from others present us with great opportunities to build bridges, make friends, and pass on accurate information. But it can also present a greater possibility of misunderstanding and sometimes even prejudice if we allow others to define who we are and what we believe rather than presenting it ourselves.

Generally, there is no problem with those who are personally acquainted with our members. But there are millions upon millions who are not acquainted with any members of our faith. I would hope that those who know very little about the Church would seek to learn more about us. I would hope they would get to know our members rather than judging us by the misinformation given by those who do not know and in some cases by those who would deliberately mislead or defame.

You as members can help this to happen by reaching out and sharing with others the basic information found in the Articles of Faith, along with such things as the facts, faith, families, and fruits of the gospel.

We should also remember that sometimes the best way to answer people’s interest can be by how we live, how we radiate the joy of the gospel in our lives, how we treat others, and how sincerely we follow the teachings of Christ.

For those who want to learn more than just the few basics I have discussed, the missionaries can be called upon to teach them the doctrine from chapter 3 in Preach My Gospel. The missionaries know how to answer more of their questions and lead them to conversion and baptism.

Now is the time for all of us to reach out and tell others who we are. Prepare some simple facts such as those I have shared with you today and help those who are curious to know a little about the Church and then to want to know more about the Restoration of the gospel.

Brothers and sisters, never hesitate to bear your testimony with sincerity and love. The power of personal testimony cannot be denied and often ignites in others the interest to know more. I know this to be true and leave you my absolute witness that I know The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true, and I bear that testimony to you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.