

Introduction

Amidst today's rapidly changing religious landscape, this report examines the religiousness, well-being, and retention of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the United States, making comparisons across religions and generations. This allows us to examine Latter-day Saints relative to other faiths and the extent to which broader cultural changes in religiousness have shaped younger generations relative to older generations. We specifically address the following questions: What is going on with Latter-day Saints in their religiousness, well-being, and retention? How do they compare with those of other faiths? How do the two youngest generations of Latter-day Saints (Millennials, born 1981–1996, and Gen Z, born 1997–2012)¹ compare with those of other faiths and with previous generations?

Today's shifting religious landscape is part of the transformation of the overall social landscape. In 2000, Robert Putnam noted decreased participation in nearly all institutions since the mid-twentieth century.² Updating this work over two decades later, Putnam found the same trends continuing to 2020.³ As he put it, after the 1960s, “virtually all our measures show a steady, unremitting decline in social connectedness over the last half century.”⁴ A recent Pew Research Center study found that the proportion of individuals in the United States not identifying as religious increased from 16% in 2007 to 29% in 2024.⁵ Yet, there are some indications that the

increase in the percentages of those with no religious affiliation has leveled off and the percentage may even be decreasing.⁶

Declines in spiritual beliefs have not been as dramatic as declines in religious affiliation. As Smith argues, “while traditional religion has declined in the United States, it has not been replaced by sheer secularism.”⁷ Indeed, although older generations are substantially more “traditionally religious” than younger generations (for example, affiliating with a religion or attending religious services), there is a relatively small gap between generations on other measures of spirituality, such as believing people have a spirit or that there is a spiritual nature to the world.⁸

At the same time as these societal changes, recent reports on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints indicate global increases in convert baptisms, congregational units, temples, and Church Educational System enrollment (including in the United States).⁹ The purpose of this report is to examine additional US trends in Latter-day Saint religiousness, well-being, and retention across time and generations and compare those trends to

Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Leveled Off: Findings from the 2023–24 Religious Landscape Study (Pew Research Center, 2025), 80, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/decline-of-christianity-in-the-us-has-slowed-may-have-leveled-off/>.

6. Ryan P. Burge, *The Vanishing Church: How the Hollowing Out of Moderate Congregations Is Hurting Democracy, Faith, and Us* (Brazos Press, 2026), 74.

7. Christian Smith, *Why Religion Went Obsolete: The Demise of Traditional Faith in America* (Oxford University Press, 2025), 368.

8. Smith and others, *Decline of Christianity*, 18–19.

9. Quentin L. Cook, “The Lord Is Hastening His Work,” *Liahona*, November 2025, 47–50; Scott Taylor, “2024 Statistical Report of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” *Church News*, April 5, 2025, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/general-conference/2025/04/05/april-2025-church-statistical-report-2024/>; “The Growth and Momentum of the Church Educational System,” Newsroom, September 25, 2023, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <http://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/growth-momentum-church-educational-system>.

1. In analyses below, we will often combine Millennials and Gen Z. We refer to them as “Millennial+.”

2. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000), 65–72.

3. Robert D. Putnam with Shaylyn Romney Garrett, “Society: Between Isolation and Solidarity,” in *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again* (Simon & Schuster, 2020), 109–62.

4. Putnam and Garrett, *Upswing*, 162.

5. Gregory A. Smith, Alan Cooperman, Becka A. Alper, Besheer Mohamed, Chip Rotolo, Patricia Tevington, and others, *Decline of*

those of other faiths. In doing so, we discuss Latter-day Saints today in the context of previous decades as well as the broader current religious landscape of the United States.

This report relies on five US datasets: the General Social Survey (GSS),¹⁰ years 1977–2022; the 2024 Pew Religious Landscape Study (PRLS);¹¹ the Cooperative Election Survey (CES);¹² the 2025 Spiritual Seismology Survey (SSS);¹³ and the Family Foundations of Youth Development Study (FFYD),¹⁴ years 2016–2024.¹⁵ The GSS, PRLS, CES, and SSS are nationally representative data sources. However, most of these datasets do not follow the same people over time and are therefore unable to capture how individuals change over the years. For example, when examining those who deidentify from a religion, cross-sectional studies can only examine their characteristics *after* the deidentification. In contrast, the FFYD surveyed the same individuals every other year from 2016 to 2024 (from approximately ages 13 to 21). For those who deidentified during these years, the FFYD has pre- and post-deidentification data, providing some insight into people’s characteristics before and after they deidentified. The FFYD has approximately two thousand youth (along with one parent from each household) who live in Utah, Arizona, and California. Drawing on all five datasets allows us to more accurately describe and understand the current religious behaviors, beliefs, well-being, and belonging of Latter-day Saints.

This report will frequently compare members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to members of

other religions. However, religious affiliation options are not all the same across the various surveys. Some surveys may ask what specific denomination a person belongs to, whereas other surveys may only ask broadly whether a person is Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, or something else. All the surveys used in this report ask specifically whether a person is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

When Latter-day Saints are compared to members of other religions, an important question is, What is the most appropriate comparison? For example, should Latter-day Saints be compared to those who belong to the religious tradition of Protestantism, to members of a specific family within Protestantism (for example, Baptists), or to members of specific Protestant denominations (for example, members of the Southern Baptist Convention)? Pew asks about specific denominations, places those denominations into families, and then places those families into religious traditions (for example, in the dataset, the Southern Baptist Convention is within the Baptist family which is within the Protestant tradition). Indicative of the unique location of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the religious landscape, the Pew survey places the Church in all three of these categories: denomination, family, and tradition. The only other such denominations are Jehovah’s Witness and Catholic.

When Pew compares the Latter-day Saint religion to other religions, it typically does so by comparing Latter-day Saint members with members of more broad religious traditions, such as Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, or Hindu.¹⁶ Although this can be useful, when researchers are specifically interested in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, such comparisons often fall short.

The Church is a single organization with membership records, an institutional hierarchy, and patterns and processes that all members everywhere are influenced by. A recent example is that the Church recently changed the pattern for Sunday School leadership and the time spent in Sunday School.¹⁷ This is a change felt by all attending

10. “The General Social Survey,” NORC at the University of Chicago, accessed April 25, 2026, <https://gss.norc.org/>.

11. Smith and others, *Decline of Christianity*.

12. Latter-day Saints often use the initials CES as short for Church Educational System, but the CES data herein refer to the Cooperative Election Survey.

13. The full SSS data contain over 100,000 participants with 1,668 current or former Latter-day Saints. We had access to only the Latter-day Saint sample. See appendix A.

14. Justin Dyer, “Family Foundations of Youth Development,” Brigham Young University, accessed April 25, 2026, <https://foundations.byu.edu/>.

15. Details of GSS methodology can be found at <https://gss.norc.org/>, PRLS methodology at <https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/>, and CCES methodology at <https://cces.gov.harvard.edu/>. SSS and FFYD data methodology can be found in appendix A.

16. For example, Smith and others, *Decline of Christianity*, 108.

17. “Changes to the Sunday Class Meeting Schedule,” Newsroom, March 30, 2026, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,

Latter-day Saints worldwide. When scholars are interested in Latter-day Saints, they are implicitly interested in the Church's structure and how it may impact the lives of Latter-day Saints. When comparing, for example, those in the religious traditions of Protestantism and Islam, one is comparing the broad belief sets (typically including shared scripture) and the historical legacies of those traditions, but what is not being compared is a specific organizational structure or hierarchy that influences individual members since such an overall structure does not exist for these broad religious traditions. Although religious tradition serves as an essential backdrop for denominations, when examining a specific denomination, what is being examined is the influence of its leadership, policies, and practices as experienced by the members of that denomination.

When comparing a denomination to a broad religious tradition such as Protestantism, a specific organizational structure is being compared to a conglomeration of organizational structures. As a simple analogy, if one is interested in how comparatively well a school is doing, one would not compare that school to a school district. Doing so would mask important individual differences within that district. By comparing one school to other schools, implications of specific organizational differences can be derived.

The purpose of this report is to understand the specific denomination of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and how it differs from similar organizations—not from a conglomerate of beliefs and historical influences. In our analyses, we therefore compare (to the degree possible) Latter-day Saints to members of other specific denominations rather than to religious traditions or denominational families.

At the same time, when examining religiousness and well-being, we note here that it makes little difference whether we compare Latter-day Saints to denominations or to broad religious traditions. As this report finds, no matter how the data are sliced, Latter-day Saints are at or near the top of religiousness and well-being compared

to other religions. Given this, when examining religiousness and well-being in this report, we generally present Latter-day Saints as compared to other religious traditions rather than to all religious families or denominations. This simplifies and enhances the readability of our graphs. However, when available, in appendix B we also provide comparisons to families of religions as well as comparisons to denominations.

We also note that this report does not make comparisons to many smaller religions, such as the Amish. It may be that some of these smaller religions are comparable to or higher than Latter-day Saints in various aspects of religiousness, well-being, and retention. However, given their smaller numbers, national surveys often do not include sufficient numbers of respondents to analyze. For example, the GSS only has five individuals who self-identified as Amish. We therefore acknowledge the limitation of not being able to represent these religions.

For retention, however, the comparison group makes all the difference and is crucial for interpretation. For example, the Pew Research Center compares the retention rate of the Protestant tradition (70%) to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (54%).¹⁸ From this, some may assume that Protestant denominations have a higher retention rate than the Church. However, the 70% does not account for switching between Protestant religions and results in comparing “apples to oranges.” Using schools as an example again, one school may be losing a substantial number of its students to other schools within the district. If one looks at retention within only the district, the district retains students well even while one school faces a retention crisis. To assess how relatively well a school is retaining its students, the meaningful comparison is to other schools.

Similarly, religious retention rates are best compared at the same level of organization: traditions to traditions and denominations to denominations. Although a broader tradition may retain individuals who move between denominations within it, a denomination does not retain those who leave it. That distinction has substantial implications for the denomination itself. Even if members leave for

<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/changes-sunday-meeting-schedule>.

18. Smith and others, *Decline of Christianity*, 108.

another denomination within the same broader tradition, the denomination they leave still experiences a loss in membership and hence a loss in reach and institutional impact. A recent example is the United Methodist Church, which had 7,600 of its congregations split from it in a single year.¹⁹ Although many of these congregations are

still Protestant (indeed, still Methodist), the denomination suffered an incredible blow. Given we are interested in retention of the specific denomination of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the meaningful comparison is to other denominations.²⁰

19. Taylor W. Burton Edwards, “Part 5: Ending Disaffiliation,” updated November 2024, The People of The United Methodist Church, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-the-umc-really-is-part-5-ending-disaffiliation>.

20. Indeed, it would be of substantial consequence to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints if it were to lose several thousand congregations in a schism. To treat the Church as a “tradition” would obscure such changes.