

# Pioneer Day

Pioneer Day is one of the major holidays for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Church) and occurs annually on **July 24<sup>th</sup>**. It celebrates the arrival of Brigham Young (the successor of Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church) to Salt Lake Valley with his followers on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1847. Pioneer Day has been celebrated since July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1849.

Throughout the early nineteenth century, members of the Church faced persecution in their settlements in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. As a result, they were forced to leave their homes and flee to the West. The Church pioneers traveled almost 1,300 miles for nearly 18 months until they gained shelter and safety in Utah. This journey was extremely challenging, and many settlers became ill or died. This holiday recognizes the pioneers' flight from persecution and their resulting safety in Utah.

## The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Sometimes popularly known as "Mormonism," the Church considers this name largely pejorative and prefers to be referred to by its official name: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, though the name is often shorted to the "the Church of Jesus Christ," with members referred to as "Latter-day Saints." The term "Mormon" originates from *The Book of Mormon*, which was published in 1830 and is considered by the Church to be scripture, along with the Holy Bible.

According to data collected by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) in 2021, about 1.5% of American adults identify as Latter-day Saints. 74% of U.S. Latter-day Saints live in the West, with 56% of U.S. Latter-day Saints living in Utah.

The religious beliefs of the Church are based on the doctrine taught by Jesus Christ and restored by founder Joseph Smith and the succeeding leaders of the church, as summarized in the Thirteen Articles of Faith. The Church is sometimes referred to as "the restored Church of Jesus Christ" because it considers itself a restoration of the original New Testament church established by Jesus Christ. Members of the Church worship God the Father and Jesus Christ and believe that salvation is achieved through Jesus Christ and His Atonement, coupled with faith, repentance, and obedience to God's commandments. Latter-day Saints view the life of humans as the time when one must choose whether to accept or reject the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Latter-day Saints' relationship with God is very personal, and followers believe that God is a loving Heavenly Father who is concerned with all aspects of their daily lives. Church members value the centrality of the family as the fundamental unit of society and as a mortal expression of the pattern set by God as the Father of all mankind. Latter-day Saints further believe that there is a responsibility to be an ethical, honorable person.

The church teaches that God reveals truth to humanity through living prophets and apostles, beginning with Joseph Smith and continuing to the current prophet and president of the Church, Russell M. Nelson. There is no professional clergy within the Church, so local men and women volunteer in capacities ranging from congregational leadership to teaching classes to missionary work. Only men are ordained to the priesthood in the Church, but women also participate extensively as church members and leaders. As a result, the church has a strong sense of community and high level of volunteerism and commitment.

### **How Will Pioneer Day Affect the Workplace?**

Pioneer Day is both a Church holiday and an official state holiday in Utah, so county offices (except emergency services), educational institutions, and many businesses will close. In addition to its cultural significance for Latter-day Saints, Pioneer Day marks the founding of the state of Utah and is therefore a state holiday. Pioneer Day may also be celebrated by Church members outside of Utah in neighboring states where Latter-day Saint pioneers originally settled, such as Idaho, Arizona, and California. In recent years, Pioneer Day has increasingly been informally celebrated by Church communities outside the United States, particularly in countries with large Latter-day Saint populations, such as Mexico, Brazil, the Philippines, and Chile.

Many Church members and residents of Utah celebrate Pioneer Day through parades, fireworks, rodeos, festivals, theater and musical events, and excursions with family and friends. The day is often marked by sunrise services and Old West reenactments. Though it is not forbidden to attend work on Pioneer Day, individuals may request time off to participate in these activities. There is no specific religious obligation associated with the holiday. Given the breadth of ways individuals throughout the world may recognize or celebrate Pioneer Day, always remember to keep an open mind, and check with employees about their specific needs.

### **Acknowledging Pioneer Day**

More and more, we see companies providing educational resources to acknowledge a range of diverse holidays, holy days, and religious festivals, including lesser-known holidays such as Pioneer Day. Holidays present an excellent opportunity for employers to support their religiously diverse employees and customers and reinforce their reputation as leaders in Diversity and Inclusion.

It is important to note that many Latter-day Saints in the United States believe that Americans know little or nothing about the Church and its beliefs. Respectful understanding and flexibility around Pioneer Day in the workplace can serve as one small step in acknowledging and respecting Latter-day Saints and their traditions, both in the United States and throughout the world.

## Greetings

If you would like to recognize the holiday with your colleagues and friends, it is appropriate to greet them with a simple “Happy Pioneer Day.”

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