



## The Name of the Church: A Matter of Identity and Doctrine

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One interesting characteristic of the revelations recorded in the book of Doctrine and Covenants is that the Lord never uses the word “religion” when referring to his kingdom on the earth.

Whenever in the revelations the Lord refers to his Church or its constituent organizations and facilities, He uses the following terms: Church, work, rock, kingdom, Zion, cause, temple, storehouse, holy land, house, strange act, tabernacle, goodly land, stake, house of the daughters of Zion, holy house, holy grounds, boarding house, Priesthood, and general conference.

Whenever the Lord refers to members of his Church and to their standing and roles He uses the terms: People, "mine own", sons, daughters, elect, "own elect", holy prophets, disciples, servants, elders, brethren, friends, saints, jewels, young men, middle-aged, warriors, and army.

By instructing us (in August 2018) to refer to the Church using its official name and to downplay the nickname “Mormon,” President Russell M. Nelson is asking us to observe more seriously and carefully one of those seemingly “small things [from which] proceedeth that which is great” (Doctrine & Covenants 64:33; brackets added).

For generations we have introduced the Church to brothers and sisters from other faiths by—very frequently—referring to what the Church does through its activities and programs, and to what we believe as members of the Church. With this inspired instruction President Nelson is essentially leading us to focus our preaching less on what the Church and its programs do, and more on what the Church is, and on our true identity as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as members of something far more magnificent and holier than “just another religious denomination”.

Using the official name of the Lord’s Church as He intends it to be called inevitably leads people—especially the Lord’s “elect”—to ponder on the meaning of the words contained in this long (and for some, no doubt “strange”) name. I can imagine that right now the Holy Ghost is inspiring countless people around the world who are earnestly seeking God’s eternal truths, but who perhaps hold prejudices against the “Mormons,” to ponder on the divinely appointed key words contained in the revealed name of the Lord’s Church—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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*Dr. Marcus H. Martins is a professor of religion and leadership at Brigham Young University-Hawaii, and has served as a translator, temple officiator, high councilor, bishop, and mission president. These remarks do not constitute an official statement of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.*

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