

# ORDAIN WOMEN

MORMON WOMEN SEEKING EQUALITY AND ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD



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## Frequently Asked Questions



### What is Ordain Women?

Ordain Women asserts that the fundamental tenets of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints support gender equality, including the ordination of women. We wholeheartedly affirm the words expressed in the following [Church statement](#): “The Book of Mormon states, ‘black and white, bond and free, male and female; ... all are alike unto God’ (2 Nephi 26:33). This is the Church’s official teaching.”

Ordain Women is committed to creating a public space to advocate for women’s ordination in the LDS Church.

### Who are you?

Ordain Women’s organizers are Mormon women who have contributed countless hours of voluntary service to the LDS Church and view our actions here as a continuation of that faith-affirming service.

We welcome all who support our initiatives and public actions in support of women’s ordination in the LDS Church.

### What is your goal?

Ordain Women envisions a religious community that better reflects the depth, breadth, and inclusiveness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, regardless of gender. We call for the ordination of women and their full integration into the governance of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We sincerely ask our leaders to take this matter to the Lord in prayer.

### Why is ordination necessary for women in the LDS Church?

Except at the highest levels of administration, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a lay church. It is organized such that all members have the opportunity to speak, teach, and pray in local congregations. Only boys and men, however, are ordained to the lay priesthood and have ritual and administrative authority in the Church. Despite their gifts, talents, and aspirations, women are excluded from almost all positions of clerical, fiscal, ritual, and decision-making authority.

While women perform significant service in the Church's auxiliaries, such as the Primary, Relief Society, Sunday School, and Young Women's organizations, their contributions are always mediated and under the direction of male priesthood leaders. According to the Church's Gospel Principles manual, "Men use priesthood authority to preside in the Church. . . . Women who hold positions in the Church . . . work under the direction of the priesthood." As such, Mormon women have many delegated responsibilities but lack the authority to define and oversee those responsibilities.

This lack of female authority does not stop at the church doors. The Church's **Proclamation** on the Family declares that men preside over their wives and families, thus preserving an antiquated and unequal model in both the domestic and ecclesiastical realms.

While many thoughtful men in priesthood leadership positions make decisions that include input from women, the male governing structure of the Church means that women's voices are inevitably left out, overlooked, and discounted.

Since leadership and positional authority in Mormonism is inextricably tied to priesthood ordination, it is clear that Mormon women must be ordained in order to be full and equal participants in their Church.

## Don't women and men have fundamentally different but equal roles?

Many Mormons respond to questions about the inequity of an all-male priesthood by insisting that men and women have distinct but equal roles. Women have motherhood, they argue, and men have the priesthood. What they fail to acknowledge is that fatherhood is the appropriate parallel to motherhood. Priesthood power is separate and distinct from parenthood and gender. The rhetoric that uses motherhood to circumscribe women's lives has been used throughout history to deny women access to the voting booth, political office, education, employment, and spiritual empowerment. Ordain Women does not question the importance of motherhood and fatherhood. Rather, we reject the use of motherhood to justify limitations on women's authority in the LDS Church.

Equality is not about sameness; it is about removing obstacles to access and opportunity. We refuse to tolerate inequity in our secular institutions. Ordain Women asserts that we must also reject it in our homes and religious communities.

## Why are Mormons resistant to women's ordination?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized during the 19th century when the prevailing culture prescribed separate spheres for men and women. As such, lingering patriarchal patterns, though increasingly contested, still inform Mormon policies with regard to familial and institutional governance. After Joseph Smith's death, priesthood became so associated with maleness that it is still difficult for Mormons to see it apart from gender. This was not always so, however. According to the 1842 minutes of the Nauvoo Female Relief Society, Joseph's original intent was to "make of this Society a kingdom of Priests . . ." Further, a number of his [contemporaries](#) believed that Joseph promised women the fullness of the priesthood. Unfortunately, this vision for the women of the Church was never fully realized.

Ordain Women asserts that priesthood must be re-envisioned as a power that transcends gender and is exercised by both men and women for the benefit of all.

## How will the ordination of women affect the LDS Church?

Equality is necessary for healthy, well-functioning relationships and communities. In a lay church, we rely on the talents and abilities of our members. To underutilize, dismiss, or impede the contributions of half our membership is self-defeating. Ordaining women will allow all of us to share equally in the full blessings and burdens of Church service and spiritual authority.

Ordain Women envisions a spiritual community in which women can again offer blessings of healing and comfort, as did our 19th-century Mormon foremothers, or have their pastoral and administrative gifts fully recognized, or join their husbands in blessing and baptizing their children, or lend their voices and experience to our decision-making councils, regardless of child-bearing ability or marital status.

Sadly, if we fail to ordain women and provide a more inclusive range of opportunities for women and girls in the LDS Church, a significant number will search elsewhere for a more equitable spiritual community, as many, particularly young and single women, already have.

## Do most Mormon women want the time commitment and responsibility of ordination?

Mormon women already give countless hours of essential service and have many delegated responsibilities in the Church. As the burden of leadership roles in the church rotates among lay members, the time commitment of most women will not likely change with ordination. However, we believe the satisfaction women experience in service would be enhanced, if they had the institutional authority to define and oversee their responsibilities, and the power of God with them to carry out their sacred duties.

## Don't men need an exclusive all-male priesthood as an incentive to serve and actively participate in the Church?

Like our sisters at [All Are Alike unto God](#), we have more faith in men—and Mormonism—than that.

## Isn't it a sin to seek power and authority?

Yes, if in seeking power your aim is to coerce, dominate, or control others. If, however, the priesthood is a Godly power that can enhance our ability to bless and serve others, why wouldn't women righteously seek it? There is no shame nor are there accusations of improper ambition attached to a 12-year-old boy in the Church who aspires to priesthood ordination. Neither should there be for women.

## In questioning Church policies, aren't you questioning God?

No. In fact, the challenge to advocate for women's ordination was articulated by former Church President Gordon B. Hinckley in a 1997 [interview with reporter David Ransom](#). When Ransom asked if the policy on denying the priesthood to women could be changed, much like it had for black men, President Hinckley responded, "Yes. But there's no agitation for that."

Ordain Women joins a new generation of faithful Mormon women who are rising up and responding to this challenge.

## Why engage in public actions?

One of the strengths of Mormonism is the belief that the heavens are yet open. As we obtain more light and knowledge, we expect Church policies to reflect that increased wisdom. We believe Church members play a part in this process. Because Mormon women lack institutional authority and access to those leaders who have the ability to receive revelation on behalf of the Church, public advocacy is one of the few options open to those of us who actively seek ordination.

## How can I help if I'm not able to attend your public actions?

In many ways, our greatest obstacle to women's ordination is a failure of imagination. As Mormon women, we can't imagine moving beyond the space we've been assigned—and when that space is a much-touted pedestal, it is limiting. Women's ordination will only enter the realm of the possible if the idea of it becomes familiar. The conversation has begun. We need your help to keep it going.

As much as possible, encourage the Mormon community to coalesce around the goal of women's ordination. Help them see that anything less is insufficient to address the gender inequality in the Church. Talk to your ward members and local leaders. Write letters. Use social media. Send us an "I support ordination" [profile for our website](#). Volunteer to help us online.

## Can men be involved?

Absolutely. Men are welcome to participate in public actions and in a variety of supportive roles. We welcome them as equality missionaries, particularly to their fellow brethren.

## What's your Ordain Women profile policy?

We do not solicit, nor do we support, diatribes against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Rather, we encourage thoughtful submissions on what the ordination of women would mean personally and/or for the institutional Church. We welcome those who are faithful Mormons, those who might return to the LDS Church but for gender inequality, or those who care deeply about the Church and its members and are concerned about how gender inequity affects all of us.

## Why should I care whether or not women are ordained in the LDS Church, the Roman Catholic Church, or elsewhere?

In his famous letter from Birmingham jail, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." We more readily recognize and decry discrimination when it's blatantly abusive. But even discrimination that is subtle can negatively affect us in profound ways. Former U. S. president Jimmy Carter recognized this when he poignantly severed his 65-year association with the Southern Baptist Convention because of its unwillingness to allow women pastors and chaplains and continued insistence that wives submit themselves to their husbands. To subjugate women and deny them equal access to decision-making authority in any community—religious or otherwise—opens up a space for more extreme forms of discrimination and abuse. Everyone in our communities, Mormon and non-Mormon alike, feels the negative impact of beliefs and practices that marginalize women.

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