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## Did LDS tithing go toward City Creek Center? Answer may depend on how you define tithing.

Some members see a difference between those donations and earnings from them; others don't. Either way, Mormonism has always been about the spiritual and the temporal.





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spoke in 2003 directly to Latter-day Saints who the faith using their donations to build a Salt Lake that “tithing funds have not and will not be used”

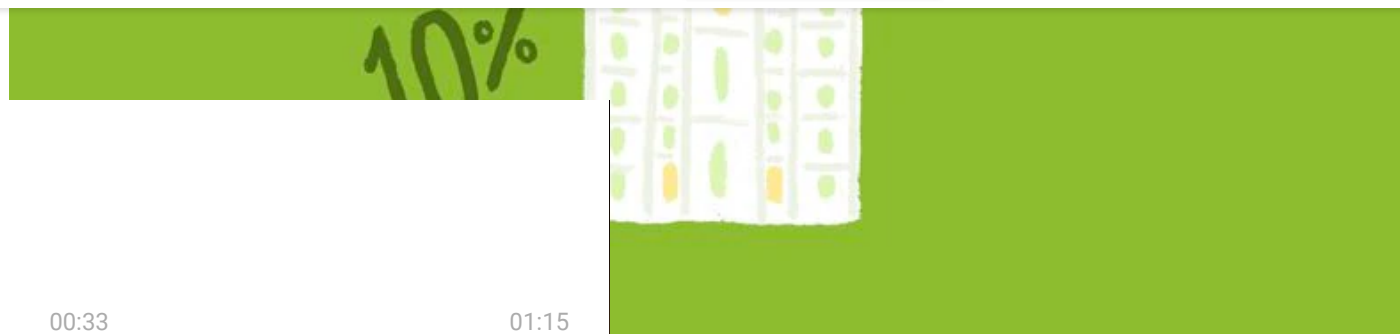
He said the money instead would come from “commercial entities owned” by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” and “earnings of [invested reserve funds](#).”

Those “earnings” for the [\\$1.5 billion shopping center](#) in the heart of downtown, however, did come from the interest on [tithing](#).

In his [federal fraud lawsuit](#) against the church, former Utahn James Huntsman argues that’s a “distinction without a difference,” alleging that Hinckley and the church misled the faithful about money for the mall.

So, what do those in the 16.6 million-member church think? Does principal versus interest matter?





her Cherrington | The Salt Lake Tribune)

“Interest on tithing money is still tithing money,” says Provo resident Marco Davis. “They shouldn’t be used for speculative business projects. And it’s a serious half-truth, if not an outright lie, to claim the City Creek mall wasn’t funded by tithing.”

Of course the church tapped tithing funds, counters Boise resident Rick Jepson. “What other funds would the church have to spend outside of tithing and the accumulated interest from tithing? Is there another fund to draw from?”

Adrian Foster of Essex, England, is “disappointed that the claim was made that it wasn’t tithing money. To differentiate between principal and interest was disingenuous and unnecessary.”

Still, he has “no problem at all with the church using funds, however obtained, in an infrastructure project that improves an important area and will provide a good return,” Foster says. “The church has a responsibility to invest funds wisely. It can only do that

effectively in commercial projects. It spends eye-watering amounts around the world and building a substantial reserve is prudent and necessary.”

The way Latter-day Saints view the shopping center and the church’s use of member contributions all depends on how they understand the purpose of tithing, says [Patrick](#) ✕



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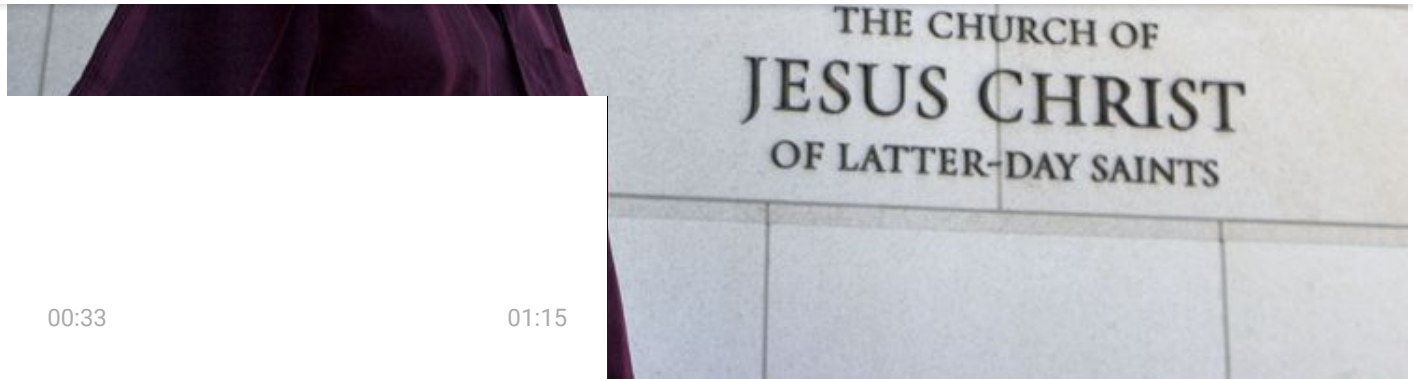
really concerned about these issues is pretty  
ation: [God’s Call to the 21st-Century World](#).” “The  
n financial matters and for the most part has  
ere haven’t been any financial scandals like with  
d personally.”

The “vast majority of members really believe they are giving that money to God,” Mason says. “It is a spiritual discipline, an act of gratitude and a recognition of the goodness of God.”

Hugh Stocks gives money to the church “because the Lord said I should.” He doesn’t worry about what it does with it or with the earnings from it, says the Gilbert, Ariz., resident. “There are some things that are just not worth worrying about in today’s world. The Lord has chosen 15 men to oversee his work in these days. If he’s not happy, he has ways to make that known.”

### Pattern from the past





(Tribune file photo) Historian D. **Michael** Quinn, who died in spring 2021, noted that, to Latter-day Saints, “it’s as spiritual to give alms to the poor... as it is to make a million dollars.”

Mormonism has never had a clear divide between the spiritual and the material, Mason points out. Even in a revelation to founder Joseph Smith, the scholar says, God commands the prophet to build both a temple and a hotel, where “[the weary traveler may find health and safety.](#)”

Thus, historian D. **Michael** Quinn (who [died earlier this year](#)) told Bloomberg Businessweek in 2012, “It’s as spiritual [for Latter-day Saints] to give alms to the poor... as it is to make a million dollars.”

From its earliest days, the church encompassed all aspects of society and even established communitarian ideals. They consecrated everything they had to the church, which returned to them what they needed. Eventually, that system was abandoned in favor of asking members to give 10% of their [annual “increase,” or income.](#)

Yet the hierarchy continued to invest in businesses and real estate.

In 1907, then President Joseph F. Smith [answered critics who had complained about the authorities receiving a salary](#), by explaining that the church had supported the sugar industry, the ZCMI department store and “some other institutions which pay





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Tithing funds “were invested in these institutions, which give employment to many, for which the trustee in trust holds stock certificates, which are worth more today than what was given for them,” he said in a General Conference sermon, “and the dividends

from these investments more than pay for the support of the general authorities of the church. So we do not use one dollar of your tithing.”

City Creek “fits right in with everything else the church has been involved in since... well, Kirtland [Ohio],” says Louisiana Latter-day Saint Calvin Porter. “We established





people think the church shouldn't be involved in business enterprises, they must be  
... the one [historians have written] about and some  
... the revelations canonized in the Doctrine and

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(Trent Nelson | The Salt Lake Tribune) City Creek Center in Salt Lake City on Monday, Aug. 23, 2021.

Michael Austin, a Latter-day Saint educator in Indiana, is not as bothered as others about the mall, he says. "I don't see any moral difference between a shopping mall and a mutual fund."





resources, I think, follows a different set of moral rules than their expenditure.



...out spending money but about managing it, ultimately spent morally or immorally is — while that cannot be answered from the text. Morality interpretation; wisdom and foolishness are very wise as well as good.”

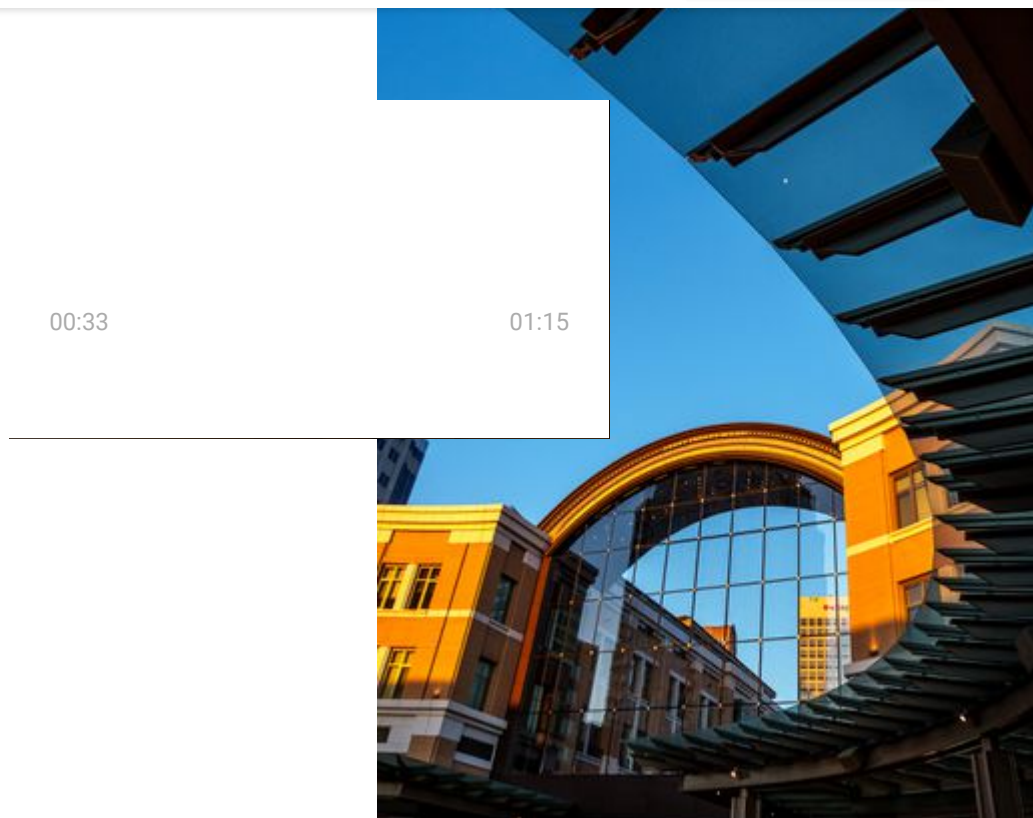
Latter-day Saints can talk about how much the church ought to spend on the poor and the needy, says Cris Baird, a Dallas businessman. “That topic is worthy of discussion. And I think the church could do more in those areas.”

He would prefer a “real estate investment that dramatically improves downtown and the area near Temple Square over 1) leaving the money in cash (burying the talent), or 2) buying some stock to hold for a while,” Baird says. “This investment is just one of many that funds the church’s global operations. I’m grateful that the revenue stream created in infinitesimal part by my voluntary donations, combined with other donations and wise investments, allows the church to continue to grow and enrich the lives of people all over the world.”

In explaining the construction of City Creek Center, [Hinckley himself stated in 2003](#) that as church leaders saw the area around the faith’s headquarters fall into disrepair, they felt a “compelling responsibility to protect the environment of the Salt Lake Temple.”







(Trent Nelson | The Salt Lake Tribune) City Creek Center in Salt Lake City on Monday, Aug. 23, 2021. Some Latter-day Saints are disappointed that their church spent money to build the mall.

Some members who live outside Utah, even the U.S., question the wisdom of using tithing or the interest on it to support a property in the Beehive State.

“I find it strange that my tithing is used to build commercial enterprises in that state,” says Mary Siever of Alberta, Canada. “A mall in Utah has nothing to do with me, doesn’t

benefit me or my family in the least and how does it benefit the church? OK. ... I guess they make some money, but still?”

Nathan McCluskey of Christchurch, New Zealand, is even more vehement.





Whether the money came from tithes, the interest on tithes or the profit from other  
 ... with consecrated funds is irrelevant to me. The  
 ... lated by the Savior in his last mortal discourse  
 ... feed, clothe, house, administer to and visit [those  
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 ... spending.

“City Creek was a gift to Salt Lake City,” says Cedar Hills resident Marisa Wright. “I would think many urban areas in our country and world would welcome a donation like this. It wasn’t a donation in the typical sense of the word, but it was a donation nonetheless. Downtown was becoming a disaster. Now it is a stylish destination that anyone can enjoy. As a Utahn I love seeing revitalization projects everywhere in the state. So the exact slicing of hairs as to where the money came from means little to me.”

Rick Jepson says he doesn’t much care whether his church spends his tithing “on cattle or buildings.”

The investment goals have always “been clear and obvious (protect principal, make interest),” the Boise resident says. “And the goals of this particular project were also clear. So if it gave a face-lift to downtown and had a financial return on investment, it did all it was meant to do.”

### Transparency and the future

[Nathan Oman](#) is a Latter-day Saint layman from at William & Mary in Virginia. isn't an





biggest return on their funds, but they did it to maintain downtown Salt Lake City.

“... the horizon in their planning,” he says. As they  
 the church to poor parts of the church, saving funds  
 and I suspect that the present church members on  
 ch members are likely to be.”

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*the **Mormon Land** newsletter, a weekly highlight reel of developments in and about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. To receive the free newsletter in your inbox, [subscribe here](#). You also can support us with a donation at [Patreon.com/mormonland](#), where you can access gifts and transcripts of our “Mormon Land” podcasts.]*

One possible way to frame the church’s investment, says [Sam Brunson](#), a Latter-day Saint tax attorney at Loyola University in Chicago, “is that we, the wealthy of 2021, are giving money to the less wealthy (or even the poor) of 2051.”

The problem with trying assess the church’s spending, investing and giving, he says, is its lack of financial transparency,

Some of the complaints and misunderstandings, Brunson argues in a [By Common Consent blog post](#), arise from church authorities being “completely opaque in how they’ve made their investment/spending decisions.”

If the church viewed members “as stakeholders, it could and would communicate its





we need to have a cushion for the next hundred years.... We debated tapping into our... [ed the hungry/something else] but we believe that... [elling.]”

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...oning rather than detailed specifics to members at... [ay “a significant level of trust and respect, trust... [th the institutional church and its members.”]

**Editor’s note** • *James Huntsman is a brother of Paul Huntsman, chairman of the nonprofit Salt Lake Tribune’s board of directors.*



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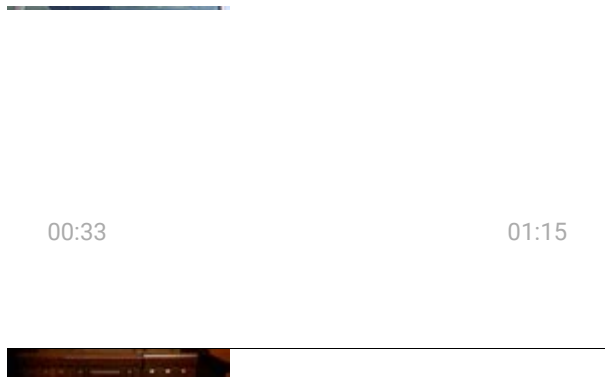
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