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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and End-of-Life Care

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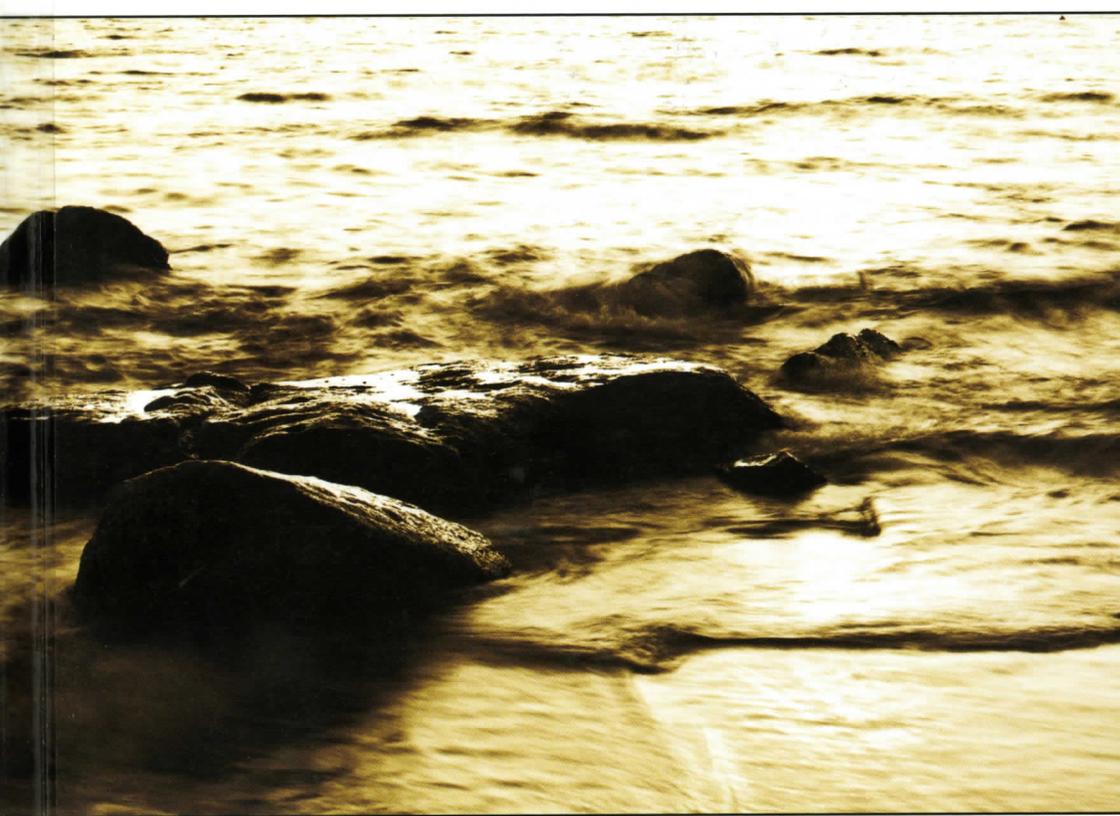
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L I V I N G W I T H G R I E F



SPIRITUALITY
AND
END-OF-LIFE CARE

PART OF THE LIVING WITH GRIEF® SERIES



HOSPICE FOUNDATION OF AMERICA

EDITED BY KENNETH J. DOKA
& AMY S. TUCCI

Foreword by Keith G. Meador

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and End-of-Life Care

Kenneth J. Doka

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), popularly known as the Mormon Church, was founded by Joseph Smith in 1830. The term *Mormon* was originally used derisively but it is now embraced by members of the LDS church. While Mormon refers to all who adhere to the belief system expounded by Smith, most Mormons belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Days Saints, though there are some independent, fundamentalist groups. Other groups, which divided from the LDS church after Smith's death in 1844, such as the Community of Christ (formally known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or RLDS) would prefer not to be called Mormons. Mormons consider themselves a distinct branch of Christianity (along with Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians). In addition to the Old and New Testament, Mormons accept the *Book of Mormon* as divinely inspired and believe that God still speaks through revelation. The LDS church is headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Church has around 13 million members throughout the world; slightly less than 50% live in the United States.

SENSITIVITIES IN END-OF-LIFE CARE

While these statements reflect the official position of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, it is always important to recognize that individual beliefs and practices may vary from denominational doctrine.

- *Dietary*: Members are expected to abstain from alcohol, illegal drug use, coffee, tea, and tobacco, and they generally avoid caffeine products. While meat can be eaten, there is an emphasis on a healthy diet that focuses on grains and vegetables.
- *Spiritual Care*: LDS members generally prefer to be connected to local LDS congregations rather than be served by a non-LDS chaplain. Mormons do

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- have rituals involving illness such as prayer and anointing with oils that should be conducted by someone with priesthood authority.
- *Medical Decisions:* When facing end-of-life decisions, LDS members study scripture, pray for revelation, and consult with their bishop and other members. They would be open to consultation with expert medical opinion. While holding that God can work miracles and heal, members of the LDS church fully accept the blessings of conventional medicine.
 - *End-of-Life Ethics:* Death is considered a natural aspect of life. Mormons need not accept care that prolongs life but they should not do anything to actively hasten death. Individual ethical decisions should involve consultation with LDS bishops.
 - *Autopsies and Organ Donations:* These are individual decisions for families.
 - *Funeral Rituals:* Funerals for members of the LDS church are open to Mormons and nonmembers. Funeral rituals will usually include viewings, a service at the Temple or funeral home chapel, a graveside service, and a shared meal. Prayers, scriptures, hymns, remembrances, and eulogies may be incorporated into the service. Services may be long—perhaps 2–3 hours. Burial is generally preferred over cremation.
 - *Afterlife:* Members of the LDS church believe that souls are immortal. After death, spirits go to a spirit world to await a physical resurrection. This time still allows for growth and instruction. Those who still do not repent face an eternal hell. Non-Mormons who lead worthy lives will receive a reward in the afterlife but will not live in the presence of God. Mormons will baptize the dead as a way to ensure that familial relationships continue in the afterlife.