

Interfaith Voices GT Column: What's In a Name?

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One common denominator for most of us, no matter where we are from, is that we were given a name. Our names were usually chosen by someone who cared about us. Names play an important role in our lives and many are pleased when their name is remembered and pronounced correctly. Names tell stories, also. We all have family tales about nick names bestowed or situations surrounding our names. Before she learned to read, my sister, Merrie, believed that Mary's Peak was named after her. My mother's name was also Alice, so family members used my first and middle name when speaking to me - "Alice Anne." But the "Alice" and "Anne" slid together and, as a youngster, sounded like "Alisand" to me. Finally, I was compelled to ask my parents why they had given me the middle name "Sand"? Positive use of one's name is also important, and no one appreciates being called something demeaning. Not only does it cause contention, but how to respond can be a source of confusion.

The name of the church to which I belong is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Besides being a long name, it has some intricacies such as an English-language influenced hyphen between "Latter" and an uncapitalized "day" in its title. It's not an easy name to remember, nor write correctly. The Church was organized in 1830 in Fayette, New York and was first known as the Church of Christ. That name was gradually adapted and officially recognized in 1851 as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. One of the names given to us by people outside our faith was Mormonites. That was likely because we have four main canons of scripture which we embrace including The Old and New Testament (The Holy Bible), The Doctrine and Covenants, The Pearl of Great Price, and The Book of Mormon. But the term "Mormon" or "Mormonites" has been used unkindly at times and does not present a clear picture of who we are and what we believe. In the last few years, our current Church President, Russell M. Nelson, has encouraged that we use the entire name of the Church because each part is important and explains our beliefs.

The Church of Jesus Christ is the first and foremost part of our name and it shares that we are an organized body of people who believe in Jesus Christ. President Nelson reminds us that each Sunday, as we sit in our chapels and partake of the Sacrament, "...we make anew our sacred promise to our Heavenly Father that we are willing to take upon us the name of His Son, Jesus Christ. We promise to follow Him, repent, keep His commandments, and *always* remember Him." The foundation of our beliefs is Jesus Christ.

The phrase "Latter-day Saints" does not intend to infer that we are perfected and godly saints living in the last days of the world. Far from it. The term "Saints" is interpreted as anyone who believes and follows Jesus Christ. In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul used the word *saint* at least once in every chapter. "Latter-day" doesn't intend to imply the end of the world. Millenia have already passed and someday the Savior will return, but no one knows that day. The "last days" must be preceded by its "latter days".

Perhaps this topic about the name of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will help the reader understand why we no longer use the term "Mormon" frequently. And personally, I'll answer to either Alice or Alice Anne, but please leave out the "sand."