# Opening Prayer
# by Adam M. Shaffer (he/they)

October 4th, 2025, Second Reform Mormon General Conference

Father, Mother, Heavenly Parents,

We come before you at the beginning of this Reform Mormon Conference and ask for a special blessing. Please help the speakers to be able to express the truths that you would have us know and be able to draw spiritual strength from during the next months before the next conference is convened.

And we thank you for all the blessings that you have bestowed upon us. And for the fellowship that we've found with each other.

Please help us to do your will.

And we say these things in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, amen.

# “Exploring Mormon Ancestral Veneration” by Roque Esperanza (they/them)

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Hello, my siblings and friends,

I've been pondering for some time about the spirit world, and our relationship with our ancestors.

I was raised believing that after death, and before the final judgement, spirits reside on a plane that is parallel to our physical earth. Rather than a separate heaven - or spirit paradise - and hell - or spirit prison - all the spirits exist in the same plane, in different states of peace or torment. I was taught that occasionally, the veil that separates our physical forms from the spirit world can be breached, and we can connect with our ancestors who are watching over us from the other side.

I can't say whether this is a common Mormon belief or if it's just something my dad found in an obscure book, but it is the understanding of the spirit realm that I was raised with, and the one that I now subscribe to in my spiritual practice. I grew up hearing about family members who communicated with deceased loved ones, through temple visits, dreams, promptings, songs, and more. The belief in ghosts was something taken very seriously in my home, with my dad regularly calling on his priesthood authority to banish anything haunting the bedroom I shared with my sisters, although it's possible he was just trying to calm our the anxiety, as we had a tendency to interpret the smallest disturbance as potential ghost interference. Regardless, I was very much aware of this idea of ghosts and how they fit into the Mormon cosmology and doctrine while I was growing up.

In recent years I've been exploring various spiritual practices, including the folk magic practiced by the communities that my ancestors came from. My dad is descended from Brighamite pioneer stock, and my mom immigrated to the US from Spain, where her family has lived as far back as we can trace. Although officially, the LDS church and the Catholic church frown on anything that looks like 'magic' or ‘idol worship’ - and often discourage or criticize the ancestral veneration that is commonly practiced among other cultures - both communities include a reverence for ancestors, and small ways in which they are honored. Catholics celebrate All Saints Day, set on the same day as the ancient Celtic holiday Samhain. All Saints day also merged with pre-Colombian Central American traditions to create Dia de Los Muertos. All three of these holidays are centered on the idea that the veil thins around the end of October and the beginning of November, as we move from fall to winter. Although each holiday has its own history and traditions, they all encourage us to remember our loved ones who have passed with rituals, including lighting candles for them, putting offerings for them on a grave or an altar, and spending time remembering them, as well as protecting ourselves from spirits who might have ill will toward us.

Mormons don't traditionally celebrate any such holiday, but we do encourage learning about our ancestors through genealogy. I remember going to the Family History Center in Salt Lake City when I was around 14 to print out one of those fan charts that shows your family back 7 generations. In the Brighamite Latter-day Saint tradition that I was raised in, we were encouraged to take family names to the temple, to perform ordinances - like baptism and endowment - for spirits on the other side, to give them an opportunity to move from a state of prison to one of peace. I have heard people share beautiful spiritual experiences of performing temple work for their ancestors, but I never had the opportunity to stand as proxy for anyone who I had a connection with, and although I loved my time in LDS temples, something about the procedural efficiency of it all left me feeling that something was lacking. It is hard to feel a spiritual connection, or to breach the veil, when a list of names you've never heard before is being read off as you get submerged in water 5-10 times in a row. Performing initiatory rites or the endowment allows for more time spent with one ancestor, but often times all you know is their name and the time period in which they were alive, which isn't a lot to start a conversation, and, in my opinion, not nearly enough to even begin reaching across the veil.

The more I explored my family histories, the more I found this connecting thread of yearning for our ancestors, without many formal traditions to encourage and foster that connection. So, I sought out advice from a book that explores various ancestral veneration practices entitled: Honoring Your Ancestors by Mallorie Vaudoise, hoping to find something that resonated, that would help me meet this spiritual need. I was surprised when I found that much of what I read aligned with things I had already believed about spirits while also giving me a greater vocabulary and understanding of the ways ancestors can touch our lives. Vohdwah helps ancestral veneration feel more accessible to the average person, saying that "Ancestor veneration can refer to any ritual or spiritual practice that reconnects you with the people who came before. Doing genealogical research, cooking your grandmother’s favorite recipe, learning the folk music and dance from your cultural background, and speaking to the dead in your dreams are all examples of ancestor veneration. Ancestor veneration practices can be secular, magical, or both. They complement a wide variety of spiritual paths." The first three things on that list - doing genealogical research, cooking family recipes, and learning music and dance - are all encouraged by the LDS Family Search Website. The last one - speaking to the dead in your dreams - is something that I have heard of prophets doing. This helped me feel like pursuing ancestor veneration didn't mean I was appropriating from other traditions, or betraying my own, but rather expanding on principles that are already practiced and encouraged within my Mormon culture.

Vohdwah comes from a variety of spiritual traditions, including Catholic, espiritismo, and African diasporic traditions.  She uses her experience from those to establish general guidelines that can be incorporated by anyone into their personal worldview and spiritual practice. She says "Ultimately, your ancestor veneration practice is your own. You are already the high priest or high priestess of this religion. That means you have the freedom and the responsibility to honor your ancestors in a way that works for both you and them."

Vohdwah explains that the word "ancestors" can be used to refer to a variety of relationships and connections one might have with those in the spirit world. Firstly, there are blood ancestors,

those to whom we are biologically related. These are important because "they created our bodies with their bodies. And because the body is the foundation for all other work in this lifetime, both in ancestor veneration and other pursuits." This principle seems to correlate with the Mormon belief that a primary purpose of coming to earth was to gain bodies, and that saving ordinances require a living body - which is the reason we perform them in proxy for spirits who are currently incorporeal, waiting for the resurrection when they can have a body again. There is something special about bodies, and honoring the people who share our DNA is important.

We inherit many things through our blood ancestors, and although much of our inheritance can be beautiful and exciting, our ancestors can also pass on their trauma.

Ancestors who never healed from their trauma, or who left this earth with unfinished business, could be what Vohdwah classifies as Ghosts. She says "I was taught growing up that ghosts were spirits of the dead who were disturbed by some business from their lives that had been left unfinished, and which they no longer had the power to address. This could be anyone from a murder victim seeking justice to a mother whose young children were depending on her when she died. The problem with ghosts is the degree to which they seek resolution through the living, often by replicating the problems they failed to resolve in their own lives."

To me this sounds like what Mormons refer to as spirit prison. Spirits who are unable to repent - or heal - and are not able to access the peace that our Heavenly Parents want to give us. In the Brighamite tradition, this is why we do temple work for the dead, to give them a chance to access Christ's atonement.

Vohdwah has a whole chapter exploring ancestral trauma, and the complexity of forgiving our ancestors who may have committed terrible atrocities.  That is an extremely important and difficult topic that I will save for another time, however I did want to share some of a ritual that she recommends for "Elevating a troubled ancestor." It's quite simple, all you need is a white cloth, a glass of water, nine white candles, eight books of roughly the same size, and a picture or significator of the ancestor who needs help.

The ritual starts by placing the white cloth on the floor, with the glass of water and the picture on top. The first candle is lit and a simple prayer is said, calling to the ancestor and saying "may you find the peace in death that you never knew in life. We raise you up to the light."  This is repeated for nine days, each day adding a book underneath the white cloth, raising the ancestor little by little out of the darkness.

To me, this is a perfect parallel to temple work for the dead. While traditional Mormon practice centers this narrative on accepting Jesus Christ and having ordinances done for you with the 'correct' authority, Vaudoise's approach gets at the heart of these kinds of practices. Some spirits are hurt and struggling, and we have the power to try and help them heal. And "When we reach backward, they reach forward, and the generations in between fall in line."  To me, this sounds a lot like the blessings that Mormons believe will come as we turn the hearts of the children to their fathers. Vohdwah encourages us to remember that "we continue to evolve after death." This contradicts many mainstream Christian beliefs about the finality of Heaven and hell,

but perfectly fits with a Mormon framing of the spirit world where spirits are constantly working to improve, to teach each other, and to repent.

Our biological ancestors are not the only spirits who can aid us from the other side. There are also lineage ancestors, people who do not share our blood, but who we are tied to in another way. This could be adopted family members, or the family of a partner or spouse. This also feels in line with Mormon belief and tradition, it reminds me of the early days of temple sealings, when people would get sealed to their friends as siblings, forging a spiritual connection that solidified their bond as family. Whether spouses, siblings, or parent and child, a sealing on earth doesn't just tie two people together, but it merges them both into each other's family lines, making their ancestors your ancestors.

Lineage ancestors can also refer to people who belonged to the same spiritual practice as you. This kind of group is usual joined by completing some kind of initiation ritual. An example of this in Mormonism could be the belief that we are adopted into a tribe of Israel when we are baptized, which is then revealed in our patriarchal blessing, or the now mostly abandoned practice of priesthood holders keeping track of their priesthood lineage. Vohdwah uses this section to talk mostly about closed practices - spiritual groups who only allow the initiated to participate in their practices, and often keep parts or all of their traditions secret to outsiders. Although I think most Mormons would not consider our religion a closed practice - afterall, LDS meeting houses say "visitors welcome" - the rituals we participate in in our temples fit this definition. One must first complete the initiatory rituals - first baptism, and then the part of the temple that is literally called 'initiatory' - before you can participate in an endowment and then a sealing. That sounds like a closed practice to me. Anyway, my point is that if you have been endowed in the Mormon tradition, by this definition, you could consider anyone else who has been endowed one of your lineage ancestors.

The next group is Affinity ancestors. These are people who share your vocation or cultural identity. Unlike lineage ancestors, this group doesn't have any kind of ceremony tying them together. Vohdwah recommends reaching out to these ancestors for things that are related to the group you share in common. So, a member of the LGBTQ community could reach out to Marsha P. Johnson when in need of support facing persecution, or a computer programmer could reach out to Ada Lovelace when they need inspiration to solve a problem at work.

Vohdwah also includes Saints among the ancestors. Although she has experience with Catholic Saints, she encourages people to work with the spirits of spiritual leaders from their own traditions. Although Latter-day Saints don’t have formal people from our history that we revere as “saints” because we consider all followers of Christ who are doing their best worthy of the title “saint”, and we generally don’t practice any kind of veneration of saints, I do think that there are multiple amazing people throughout Mormon history who could qualify under this definition of a spiritual leader who remains accessible to people on earth. I once saw a booth at a Provo Pride fair selling devotional candles with images of Mormon feminist icons such as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Claudia Bushman, Maxine Hanks, Carol Lynn Pearson, Judy Dushku, and Chieko Okazaki. Although these candles may be a bit tongue-in-cheek, I think they're a great example of Latter-Day Saints that might be looked to for inspiration, strength, and advice.

The last category of ancestors we'll talk about today are spirit guides. These spirits can come from any or none of the previously mentioned categories. What sets them apart is that they have chosen specially to walk with you throughout this lifetime, to guide and teach you. I have a vague memory of my dad telling me about spirit guides when I was a kid, beyond the idea that my great-grandparents were watching over me, something about a group of spirits who were dedicated to keeping me safe. Like a guardian angel, but a group of them, rooting for me. I don't know if this actually happened or if it was some kind of dream, but learning about spirit guides now always brings up this feeling of mysterious familiarity. I talked with another magically inclined Mormon about spirit guides and she gave me some advice on how to connect with them. While ancestors from the other categories can often be researched and sought out by name, spirit guides must make themselves known to you, but first you have to demonstrate that you are prepared to connect with them and listen. This can be done through quiet meditation, walks through nature, or other practices that help you feel open spiritually. In these states, you can call out to your guides and begin to build a relationship.

My fellow magical Mormon said at this point that you have to start keeping your eyes open, your ears open, for little promptings. Basically the same kinds of things that you would expect to get from the Holy Ghost, but in some ways you'll come to notice the difference between the Holy Ghost and other spirit guides helping you through this life.

Some Mormons may worry that ancestral veneration looks too much like idol worship. After all, we generally eschew the Catholic practice of praying to Saints, and are encouraged to keep our prayers focused on Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus Christ - in the mainstream Brighamite tradition, we are told not even to pray to our Heavenly Mother. However, our history is rich with tales of people - from prophets to children - receiving revelation from the spirits of their deceased loved ones.  How can we expect them to reach us if we have never called out to them?  I believe that our Heavenly Parents are not threatened or offended by us developing our spiritual relationships with others, just like my relationship with my earthly mother is not diminished by my relationship with my sister. Building trust and connection with a variety of ancestors will not lessen your connection to our Heavenly Parents. On the contrary, strengthening your ties with those who lived before will likely increase your faith, compassion, and patience, helping you to be more like our Heavenly Parents. Vohdwah claims that "The lack of ancestor veneration practices in [the broader American culture as a whole] is unusual and unhealthy ... Healing our personal relationship with our ancestors is one small but powerful way we can address these collective wounds."

I am still new at developing my ancestral veneration practice, however even with the small and inconsistent rituals I have done, I have had profound experiences.

Taking a moment to meditate and call out to my ancestors - I don't know really how to describe it. I learned from my mom some deeper things about the story of her mother and her grandmother, and I was able to try and call out to my great-grandmother, understanding some of the trauma and tragedy that she went through, and I felt her in the room with me. I felt her grief. I felt that reach out that Vohdwah describes, and it was terrible, her pain, her anguish, and her loneliness, but it was also cathartic, and it was healing to have this understanding of the

ancestral trauma that's been passed down through the women on that side of my family, and to start in little ways to hold that trauma and help my great-grandmother let it go.

I know ancestral veneration isn't going to be for everybody. I know that not everyone believes in literal spiritual practices, and I think that's one of the great things about Vohdwah's book is that she invites us to take her information and recommendations and use them however to fit our own lives, and our own practices, and our own traditions. But even if you think ancestral veneration might not be for you, I would urge you to learn more about the lives of your ancestors. They don't have to be your blood ancestors; they can be, but they can also be lineage and affinity ancestors - anybody that you feel some kind of connection to, that their life somehow resonates with you or is connected to yours.

I truly believe that staying connected to our past and understanding where we come from and how we got where we are is healing and crucial. I invite you to seek out ways to honor your ancestors in whatever manner makes sense to you and resonates with you.

I share this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

# “My Calling as Matriarch”
# by Evan Sharley (she/her)

October 4th, 2025, Second Reform Mormon General Conference

## History of Matriarchs

My calling is to be a Matriarch, which is the feminine version of "Evangelist" or "Patriarch". Evangelists are a sub-section of High Priestess/Priestx/Priest.

The first Patriarchs in the Restoration were Joseph Smith Sr. and Hyrum Smith, and their chief duties were to generally act as parental figures for the church and give special blessings. These blessings served as a sort of cold reading/fortune telling where spiritual promises were made. Additionally, these blessings "declared your lineage", meaning what tribe of Israel someone was "from".

After the Successionist crisis it took a bit of time for Patriarchs to find their places in the Restoration again. In the LDS branch, the role of Evangelists did not expand, and their chief function in the community was to give these blessings. In the RLDS branch the role of Evangelists was magnified quite a bit, and it is chiefly through the lens of this tradition that I see my call as Matriarch.

RLDS D&C 125, which was given by Joseph Smith III on April 15th, 1901, laid the modern foundation for the duties of Evangelists. This revelation said that Evangelists are to preach, teach, expound, exhort, to be a revivalist, comfort the saints, be a parent to the church, give counsel for those who seek it, and impart Evangelist's blessings. It also clarified that Evangelists are to remain free from administrative duties, which is a point of doctrine that the Josephites share with the Brighamites. Within the RLDS tradition, Evangelists are to be fully included in priesthood meetings, and their perspectives and opinions are to carry weight, despite not having administrative sway. While the office of Presiding Patriarch was done away with in the LDS church in 1979, the Presiding Evangelists of Community of Christ continue to be well-respected figures in Church life. These Evangelists have written a great deal over the years, even producing entire books of theology and poetry.

In addition to the guidance offered by the Josephites, the Restoration Church of Jesus Christ also offered a trove of knowledge in their book “Hidden Treasures and Promises”, specifically from “The Lost Revelations”. One interesting thing about these revelations is that the guidance that is given is chiefly for Matriarchs with the understanding that it also applies to the masculine and non-gendered counterparts as well. The 7th “Lost Revelation” speaks of how Matriarchs are to have a special interest in Temple work. Amazingly, this is also a point of doctrine that is shared with the Josephites; in RLDS D&C 157:4, a Patriarch is specifically called to assist in the work of building the Temple and developing its ministries.

# Roles of the Matriarch

In the mid-90s, RLDS Presiding Evangelist Everett S. Graffeo distilled the duties of Evangelists down into 4 points, and in the early 00s Danny A. Belrose added a 5th. I think these 5 roles are a perfect explanation of what I feel my role as a Matriarch should be, and I'd like to explore them with you today. That said, I feel like the titles of the 5 roles could be modified to come closer in line with scriptural terminology, and so I will do so. These five roles are:

1. Teaching Learner
2. Living Sanctuary
3. Soul Friend
4. Revivalist
5. Pastoral Presence

## Teaching Learner

Matriarchs are meant to be wise elders who have lived deeply enough to taste the richness and meaning of life, with its many joys and pains. They are attuned to savor the presence of the Holy in places it is often overlooked or disregarded.

They are also well educated in not only the Mormon tradition, but also about other traditions and in secular matters. Life-long learning and sharing that knowledge is treated as a sacred practice.

These educations equip them to:

- give guidance and counsel to those who are in want of it
- lend wisdom to those whose zeal exceeds their judgment.
- Direct seekers to resources that will enrich their understanding.
- Give life advice based off of personal experience

The Matriarch does not argue or debate, but instead invites, hints, and encourages others.

## Living Sanctuary

As living sanctuaries, Matriarchs embody the baptismal covenant:

"bear one another's burdens, that they may be light: … mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort… even until death" (Mosiah 9:9 (RefMo) | 9:39-40 (RLDS) | 18:8-9 (LDS))

Matriarchs actively resist oppression in all its forms - sexism, racism, classism, ableism, ageism, genderism, and religious intolerance. They use their voice to condemn unjust systems and offer solace to the wounded.

At the same time, they provide safety, refuge, and nonjudgmental presence - becoming a harbor in life's stormy seas. As they provide this solace, they listen to others' life stories, and consider it an honor and a privilege to hear these. The Matriarch also understands that when another

person is sharing their story, the focus should not be on the matriarch but on the person telling their story.

## Soul Friend

Early Celtic Christianity had a community role called "anam ċara" or "soul friend", who were companions with whom you could share vulnerabilities, loneliness, weaknesses, fears, and hopes, and they would respond with love and affirmation in such a way that makes you feel safe, blessed, and understood. The Matriarch is called to be such a friend to those in her communities.

Being a soul friend requires:

- listening deeply, and resisting the impulse to fix or advise prematurely
- discerning needs, and when uncertain, asking what is most needed
- protecting confidentiality, since broken trust discourages future sharing.

A particularly sacred part of this role is offering Matriarchal blessings. These blessings come during times of transition and are preceded by weeks or months of friendship-building and dialogue, and are meant to give the blessed guidance and solace. The Matriarch prays, ponders, and writes out what she would like to say during the blessing, which ideally is done by laying hands on the blessee's head. She records the audio of the blessing, and provides a transcript of the blessing to the blessed, keeps one in her own records, and provides another to a historical archive (with a 15 year seal). Many who receive such blessings cherish them as personal scripture.

As a note, when I give Matriarchal blessings, I have decided not to "declare a lineage". At best, being designated as a tribe was like being sorted into a house in Harry Potter and only provided a weak sense of belonging. At worst this practice essentially re-maps Jewish identity onto a Mormon framework where "Israel" is not the Jewish people but a symbolic covenant group where Mormons see themselves as central. In light of these problems, I opt to not declare lineage in the blessings I give, which is the now-standard practice in Community of Christ.

## Revivalist

Matriarchs are called to be revivalists. Danny Belrose explored how the word "revivalist" can make folks a bit uncomfortable, as it invokes images of tent revivals and fire and brimstone. However, within Mormonism revivalist ministry involves cultivating an adventurous spirit and exercising a prophetic imagination. Matriarchs see beyond the present moment and seek to inspire communities toward a hopeful future.

As revivalists, Matriarchs breathe new life into old traditions, helping people rediscover their vitality. This can take many forms:

- Rekindling enthusiasm for sacred stories and practices.
- Reinterpreting old rituals or creating new rituals that speak powerfully in contemporary contexts.

- Inspiring fresh excitement about Temple work, whether in building Tabernacles, crafting new liturgies, or preparing people for their Endowment.

At its core, revivalist ministry is not about spectacle but about sustained transformation. The Matriarch inspires communities to reawaken their dreams and gives them courage to live into those dreams with hope and energy.

### Pastoral Presence

The ministry of the Matriarch is grounded in pastoral presence, the simple practice of consistently showing up in the life of the community. During her deliberate efforts to be present, she discerns the community's needs and gently guides them toward growth, while also giving special attention to newcomers so they feel welcomed and integrated. Though not dramatic, through repeated acts of being there, listening, and participating, the Matriarch embodies Christlike care, offering stability, comfort, and the assurance that the community is never alone.

## Closing

In embracing my call of Matriarch, I see myself as accepting a communal role that has always been with the Restoration. This calling is not only about wisdom or blessing but about nurturing - about standing beside the weary, cradling the wounded, and defending those who live at the margins of society and faith. To be a Matriarch is to create sanctuaries where all may feel safe, to walk as a soul friend with the vulnerable, and to raise a prophetic voice against oppression in every form.

This ministry dares to believe that communities can be healed, that hope can be revived, and that God's love is most powerfully revealed in the care we extend to one another. In this way, the Matriarch both honors the wisdom of the past and inspires a future where compassion, justice, and blessing are woven deeply into the life of the Restoration.

# Joriz Montes's Conference Talk

October 4th, 2025, Second Reform Mormon General Conference

Hi guys, I'm Joriz Montes. I'm 29, I'm a Filipino, and I'm a Latter-day Saint. I'm a dancer. I'm an artist, and I'm a YouTuber, and I am so humbled and so grateful to be a part of this one big family, this great movement.

It was sealed by so much blood, sweat, and tears of all who had gone before us, most especially the prophet Joseph Smith.

You know, I'm so grateful for this opportunity that you would let me, if you will, allow me to share my testimony.

Way back then things are going fine for me and it seems like I would be like that for the rest of my life. I had a lot of friends. I had a lot of money. But way back then when I was still affluent, I'm not yet in love with the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. I was with another religion that is against it.

But you know, God really talks to us so hard if we really go against him. Like it was a big slap on my face. It was a big cold water to me when I lost everything. I lost my friends. I lost my money. And I was finding myself begging, like literally begging at every single church that I could see, thinking that I might get God there. I might see God there. That He may have mercy on upon me.

And that was when I got really thinking that I hated the prophet Joseph Smith. I hated the Restoration. And it was then that I began rethinking my stand on the Restoration and on the prophet Joseph Smith, and I learned to embrace it. I learned to love it. And I became a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And I was so happy!

And really what pulled me into this church is because it was so fascinating to know that the United States has an origin story, and that origin story is the Book of Mormon. And I was also very sympathetic with how prophet Joseph Smith and many other people like the pioneers have suffered so much just for their faith in this.

So, I got into the mainstream Latter-day Saint Church, but sadly, I don't know um this is how it went with any one of you, but sadly fate has it that I got a very very strict local leader, local authority. Like at first they were so nice to me, they were so welcoming to me. But when they found out that I am a dancer...

I want to have my videos done properly, neatly done. That I must have much light. If you're following videos. But how my house is built, as you may have noticed, doesn't allow me to neatly perform my dance videos, because the light isn't properly coming in. So I had to go elsewhere to do my dance videos properly, where where it is impolite. The only place here in my town where I could do it is our local ward meeting house, where there is ample light.

Sadly, I began using, slightly, our ward meeting house for my dance videos, and sadly my local authority had found that out, and he was so very strict, and he kicked me out. He really changed the way he treats me - like I'm a nobody and I no longer matter to him anymore because he was indicting me that I purportedly "broke the chastity rule of the church".

He said I mustn't be wearing wearing revealing and provoking clothes, which is what I do in dance. I wear I scantly dance wear. I wear almost nothing. I'm almost bare naked in my dance videos, because that's the only way in which I feel comfortable. That's the only way I feel able, fully capable, to properly conduct my dance videos, and I cannot even dance properly with much clothes on.

So my local leader have ejected me out of the church because he thinks - he claims - that I'm purportedly "provoking immorality" because of my dancing.

You see, conservative people appreciate classical art, old art, which most of the time depicts scantily-clad people, people who are almost bare naked, and they appreciate it. They just say "It's just art", but they don't appreciate being bare naked if it's done actually. They're insisting that we should always wear temple clothes every single time. I think that's very self-contradictive. It's very inconsistent and we must change that.

You see, I don't throw away my confession. The church is still good for me. It's still wonderful. I will never exchange my witness of the Restoration, and of my Savior, and of the prophet Joseph Smith, and of the Book of Mormon for anything else.

But sadly, there are people who think that they could just do anything - just make us live in fear just because they think they have authority and they think they have all the power in the world, that God allows them to make us all live in fear and without trust. They don't create confidence, and they don't build relationships with all of us. That's just one of the many things we have to change in this movement.

We must also be open. We must have full communion with other Christian churches. Let's no longer only pretend that we're friendly to them. We've been friendly to them, but we don't allow them to take the sacrament. We don't accept them fully into our orders (recognize their priesthood). We don't let them preach and officiate in us, and they don't let us govern and administer in their places. Well, that must change because we are all Christians. We all confess Jesus Christ, but if we still keep our boundaries from one another, like we think "this people" or "that people have some deadly disease and that we shouldn't be even associating with them", I don't think that's right. And all these claims of ecumenism will be for nothing, just because we refuse to enter into full communion with these churches. We must recognize them and they must recognize us. We must be no longer different than each other. Yes, we keep our identities, but we must work together. We must learn and begin to work together, because we are all Christians.

And also I would like to ask all of you Latter-day Saints that, as much as we must be open, we must also be receptive to new scripture, right? The prophet Joseph Smith said that if the Lord doesn't reveal more to him, then let the world discover it. Well, thus saith the Lord! Because

Joseph Smith said that, let the world discover it! And many of our cousins in this big Restoration movement have already discovered many, many scriptures, far ahead of our individual respective jurisdictions, and we don't accept those scriptures that are not of our jurisdictions just because they're not of our jurisdictions. Again, we're all Christians. We must change that and we must be receptive to new scripture.

We must be receptive to new revelation, and sadly also I see that there are many churches who *claim* to be Latter-day Saints, but I strongly believe in the tradition of living prophets and living apostles, and sadly some who claim to be Latter-day Saints do away with these and they think they could just go directly to God. Yes, we could all go directly to God, but sometimes that might be misled. These same people who pretend to be Latter-day Saints claim that even the prophets and the apostles are themselves misled, and that they refuse such leadership. They refuse to be organized with such leadership, because they think that prophets and apostles are imperfect people. Well, who of us are perfect? None of us is. No.

We must be open to new scripture. We must be open to new revelation. And we must be open to our fellow cousins, to the leadership of our companions here in this movement. Let us accept the leadership of prophets and apostles.

Well, there must be checks and balances. There must be transparency. We must never ever lose that. That's one of our identities. That's what makes us peculiar. Just one of the many things makes us peculiar.

And again, we must not make people live in fear. Like our Lord, we must be merciful. Céline Dion said, "love doesn't always follow the rules". Our lord Jesus Christ himself went bare naked for us when he died and rose again for us. Why don’t we do that, right? All the more we can remember Christ just by being bare naked! Most especially if you are an artist like me. We don't lose divine guidance if we go bare naked. All the more we will invoke that, because that is a gesture of presenting ourselves as an emulated sacrifice before God.

My faith will not change. My testimony is still strong. But sadly, some people exercise unrighteous authority and unrighteous dominion. We must change that.

And also we must reaffirm that the United States - with all of its imperfections - is still the land choice above all other lands, because God expects us Americans to be beacons of light, of kindness, of mercy and compassion. He has given us a very special mission, and the greatest manifestation of that love and mercy of God for the United States is giving us the prophet Joseph Smith, and this work, and this wonderful movement. We must reaffirm that we must rise to this great blessing of our calling. We must accept it. We must embrace it. We must do good in it. We must be very aware of it. I testify of that.

I testify that God lives. I testify that Jesus is the Christ. And as much as we must and will be exalted with God, we must also understand that it is not wrong to revere the saints. It is not wrong to revere the real presence of our Lord in the holy eucharist. It is not wrong to revere images and statues of Christ and the saints. It is not wrong to revere Mary as our Heavenly

Mother, Mary Magdalene as the blessed spouse of our Lord. It is not wrong to revere Joseph Smith as the incarnate Holy Spirit. It is not wrong because that is our destiny.

It is a big disservice to those who went before us, especially if they sacrificed a lot, if we think that God is a credit grabber, self-centered, and that He doesn't care anymore about all of us. That thinking, that God doesn't care anymore about us, is sin in people who exercise unrighteous authority over us who are trying to live our faith with good intentions.

I know that God lives. I know that Jesus is the Christ. I know that Joseph Smith is Their prophet. And I know that Mary lives. She knows and She loves us. She is our Heavenly Mother. That Mary Magdalene and all the other saints - John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, all of them, the apostles, the prophet Joseph Smith - they all live. They all know and love us, and they share with Christ in this work. They stand at the head of this dispensation. They direct us. They love us.

I know that if we do these things that God will be happy with us. We will be able to realize our calling more than we ever think we could ever do.

My heart goes out to everybody who is like me and has been a victim of unrighteous dominion. I urge you to never lose your faith in the Restoration. There's still good out there. There's still good! Just hold on to Mary. Just hold on to the saints. Hold on to the sacrament, to the eucharist. And if we do that, if we open our hearts, if we be open, if we be transparent, you will realize that there's nothing good if you throw this entire identity away. People are imperfect. People come and go, but Mary still remains. Mary lives, the saints lives, the eucharist lives, and you will be exalted as they are. That's your destiny. No one can take that away from you.

You just do these things. You just be open. You just be kind. You just be humble. Sadly, many people in the movement think that they're so skillful that they don't need these things anymore. They could just go away from all of these things and still be proud and arrogant, just as the mainstream church does. This must stop, and it must stop now! Hopefully we all work together, God helping us to stop it. I know that we could do this, and that this is the will and the word of the Lord.

I love you guys. Thank you so much. And I say these things are true in the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

# “Personalizing Mormonism for Today”
# by Roman (they/them)

October 4th, 2025, Second Reform Mormon General Conference

Hello, my name is Roman, and let me share with you today my talk on making Mormonism personally meaningful.

Reform Mormonism is rooted in the understanding that our faith is not about conformity to a single path, but about empowering each of us to chart our own journeys of Eternal Progression. Each person brings unique life experiences, insights, and creativity to the table. As we share these with each other, our diverse contributions can expand the living tradition we share.

One way I personally practice a traditional Mormon principle in a new way is by expanding the concept of eternal families. In the church I grew up in, this teaching was tightly linked to Temple ordinances and legal definitions of a nuclear heteronormative family. For me now, it means consciously building my chosen family through bonds of love, care, and mutual responsibility. I see “eternal”, not as a contract sealed in a single moment, but as the ongoing work of sustaining relationships across time, space, and circumstances. Whether it is friends who have become siblings to me, mentors who have guided me like my elder kin, or communities that have embraced me as their own, I honor these connections as sacred. In blessing meals, offering words of comfort, or gathering for shared rituals, I am enacting the principle of eternal family in a way that reflects my lived understanding and my values.

One way Mormonism can become personally meaningful for all of us is through storytelling and by openly sharing our lived experiences. When we speak about what faith has meant in the struggles, transitions, and joys of our lives, we invite others to see the gospel not as something rigid or imposed, but as something living and adaptable. Our stories bear witness that Mormonism can nurture us as we are, not only as we are told to be.

Reform Mormonism gains personal meaning through the ordinances and rituals we create for ourselves. Sacred action is not limited to a small list of authorized ceremonies. Many Reform Mormons have written blessings for life milestones, consecrated relationships, celebrated gender transitions, honored ancestors, or marked personal achievements through ritual. These practices affirm our dignity, our agency, and our worth. They remind us that Eternal Progression is not only a cosmic doctrine, but also a daily reality we can embody with intention.

Equally important to me are the new insights that we can all uncover in the principles and texts we inherited. When we revisit scripture, familiar sayings, or traditional Mormon teachings with new understanding, we find deeper meaning. A verse once used to restrict can become a source of liberation. A principle once applied narrowly can be expanded to embrace broader human experience. What was once an obligation can be transformed into a source of joy.

Giving Mormonism personal meaning is a creative act. This isn't about abandoning tradition or blindly repeating it, but about connecting with it in light of who we are today. Reform Mormonism invites us to be not only recipients of this tradition, but also authors of it.

As we watch today and to those watching after, let us share our stories, our rituals, our insights. Let us celebrate the diverse ways we make Mormonism our own. In doing so, we continue the great work of Eternal Progression, becoming more fully ourselves, more deeply connected with our planet and the communities we are a part of.

Thank you, and amen.

# “The Gift of Revelation”
# by Evan Sharley (she/her)

October 4th, 2025, Second Reform Mormon General Conference

## 1. What Is Revelation?

### 1.1. Introduction

Many Abrahamic religions argue that Divine gifts such as prophecy and new revelation are relics of the past that ceased with the apostles. This perspective is known as “Cessationism”. Some famous cessationists are Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Charles Hodge. In contrast, there are those who believe that these gifts continue into our day, which is a perspective called “Continuationism”. Some famous continuationists are John Wesley, George Fox, and Joseph Smith Jr.

However Mormonism, which was largely started by Joseph Smith Jr., is unique among the continuationists, because these communications are not held merely as appendices to ancient scripture, but are often considered or even canonized as modern scripture.

Yet, despite its centrality to our tradition, revelation remains a concept that eludes easy definition. What exactly is revelation? Is it the very words of God dictated to a prophet? Is it a profound impression upon the soul? Is it reserved only for those in authority, or does it belong to all who seek it? These questions are not new—they have shaped our history, our doctrine, and our identity as a revelatory people. In light of these questions, it is wise to take time to define what we mean by “revelation” today. Furthermore, as a people who seek divine guidance, we must also be vigilant against the misuse of the gift of revelation, because while our history has shown that revelation can inspire and uplift, it also has been invoked to justify oppression and division.

As we explore revelation, we must do so with humility, recognizing that the sacred has always been mediated through human experience. Whether plenary or conceptual, general or special, revelation is ultimately an invitation—not merely to receive, but to discern, to wrestle, and to grow. Our task is not merely to ask, “What is revelation?” but to seek, as Joseph did, the wisdom to interpret and apply it in our lives today.

### 1.2. Plenary VS Conceptual Revelation

With this understanding in place, we turn to an essential question: how does revelation function? Throughout our history, revelation has been understood in different ways—sometimes as a word-for-word dictation from God (plenary revelation), and at other times as a divinely inspired concept that someone expresses in human language (conceptual revelation).

It would be wise to examine both of these perspectives as they pertain to our past and present and how we want to understand revelation as we move into the future.

### 1.2.1. Plenary

“Plenary” means “complete” or “full.” In the context of revelation, plenary revelation typically refers to the belief that the Divine directly dictated the words which are recorded in scripture. Under this view, the written document is comprehensive, all-encompassing, and a perfect disclosure of Divine knowledge and truth.

One of the most well-known instances of revelation that is considered plenary would be the 10 Commandments, which scripture states were inscribed by the very finger of God upon stone tablets (Exodus 31:18). However, even within Mormonism we have had our own instances of belief in plenary revelation. For example, Joseph Smith Jr.’s September 1830 revelation says:

> “thou shalt give heed unto all [of Joseph Smith Jr.’s] words, and commandments, which he shall give unto you… for his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth”

This passage suggests that Joseph Smith Jr. intended his revelations, and consequently the Doctrine and Covenants, to be regarded as plenary in nature.

Within the Reorganization there continued to be a persistent belief in a plenary understanding. For example, many voiced a fair amount of opposition when the 1966 “Revised Authorized Version” of the Book of Mormon was announced, as it made some minor grammatical and linguistic changes to make it more understandable. The reason for this opposition was that they believed that the 1908 Authorized Version was a plenary translation of the Golden Plates, and to modify the text, even to make it grammatically correct or more accessible to a modern audience, would be to corrupt the word of God.

### 1.2.2. Conceptual

“Conceptual” pertains to ideas, concepts, or mental constructs. Conceptual revelation, therefore, is the process by which Divine knowledge and truth is revealed as general concepts, leaving writers to articulate these insights in human language. Such writings may or may not be canonized as scripture.

While Joseph Smith Jr. asserted a plenary view of revelation, there are notable passages of scripture that call this into question. One of the strongest arguments for a conceptual understanding is the evolution of Smith’s revelations over time, with significant alterations in meaning. For example, Joseph’s April 1829 revelation underwent substantial changes that reflect a shift in interpretation:

(chart)

Early versions of this revelation affirmed Oliver Cowdery’s gift in the use of dowsing rods, a practice associated with folk magic and divination. Later revisions altered the meaning,

distancing the text from its original implication. Such modifications indicate a move away from plenary revelation toward an implicit acceptance of conceptual revelation.

The Josephites in particular have had an overt transition to a conceptual understanding of revelation. The Reorganization's first major engagement with conceptual revelation came during the 1880s Gurley Reformation, led by Jason W. Briggs and Zenas H. Gurley Jr.. These reformers opposed a plenary view and saw the RLDS First Presidency as attempting to seize more ecclesiastical power through World Conference Resolution #215. While Resolution #222 introduced ambiguity just the next year, it ultimately was not persuasive enough and the reformers resigned in 1886, citing the church's stance on scripture. In response, the RLDS passed Resolution #308 which explicitly rejected a plenary view and solidified its commitment to conceptual revelation—a stance still in effect today.

This choice would go on to be expounded upon by later theologians. For example, in 1967 F. Henry Edwards said:

> "The idea of plenary inspiration… no longer stands the test of careful scrutiny"

In 1969 the Basic Beliefs committee for the church all but eliminated any doubt on if a conceptual understanding of revelation reigned supreme in the church when they said:

> "Such [Divine] disclosure is experienced in the hearts of men rather than in the words by which the revelation is interpreted and communicated."

Several RLDS presidents have attempted to articulate what their revelatory process was like. Wallace B. Smith explained his perspective in the Herald article "The Prophetic Experience" and prefaces of the last 20 or so CoC Doctrine and Covenants sections speak of this process. However, perhaps the most thorough exposé on the modern Josephite revelatory process comes from Steve Veazey's article in Restoration Studies XI entitled "Stepping into the River of Revelation in the Restoration Tradition". In this article Veazey explores the collaborative development of CoC Doctrine and Covenants 163, thus illustrating a conceptual model of revelation.Perhaps the most tangible ways that the Josephites interact with conceptual revelation today is through the evolution of the sacrament prayers:

(chart)

### 1.2.3. Conclusion

The tension between plenary and conceptual revelation has shaped the way we understand Divine communication throughout our history. While plenary revelation asserts a fixed, word-for-word transmission from God, conceptual revelation allows for divine truths to be interpreted, adapted, and expressed in human language, and even be seen as products of their time and culture.

Although Joseph Smith Jr. initially framed his revelations in a plenary manner, the historical record suggests an approval of a conceptual understanding—both in the modifications of Smith's revelations and in the broader trajectory of some Mormons such as the Josephites. The

shift to conceptual has allowed for greater theological flexibility and adaptation, as seen in the ongoing evolution of scripture, doctrine, and sacramental language.

As we move forward, this broader understanding of revelation leads us naturally to another important distinction: the difference between general and special revelation. While plenary and conceptual frameworks describe the mechanism of revelation, general and special revelation describe its scope. This next section will explore how revelation is experienced on both a universal and a personal level, helping us better understand how God communicates across different contexts.

## 2.1. General VS Special Revelation

When exploring what revelation is, the teachings of the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas stand as a cornerstone. Within his framework, he defined two distinct modes of Divine communication: “General revelation” and “Special revelation.” These two modes both bring insight and meaning to our understanding of God, and so it is wise to explore these in more depth.

### 2.1. General

In Genesis 6:66 of the Inspired Version/Joseph Smith Translation of the bible, we are taught that:

> “…all things are created and made to bear record of [God]; both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath, all things bear record of [God].”

The natural world is a glorious creation of God, and like all art, it serves as a teacher regarding the nature of its Creator. We study and learn from the Divine by using our senses, instruments, and reason, and in doing so we are able to make observations and discoveries. These revelations are consistent and universally accessible and self-evident regardless of location or religious beliefs.

Those who seek these general revelations are called scientists. They specialize in countless ways, such as medicine, biology, cosmology, and physics. The writings of these wise teachers benefit the whole of humanity, and the goodness that they bring should be held in esteem. Apostle Orson Pratt one taught that:

> “The study of science is the study of something eternal. If we study astronomy, we study the works of God. If we study chemistry, geology, optics, or any other branch of science, every new truth we come to the understanding of is eternal; it is a part of the great system of universal truth. It is truth that exists throughout universal nature; and God is the dispenser of all truth—scientific, religious, and political. Therefore let all classes of citizens and people endeavor to improve their time more than heretofore—to train their

> minds to that which is best calculated for their good and the good of the society which surrounds them."

Joseph Smith Jr.'s 1833 revelation commands us to "seek learning, even by study and also by faith," urging us to embrace all sources of wisdom that lead to greater understanding. To neglect the discoveries of science is to turn away from a vast, unfolding testament of God's handiwork. Therefore, scientific writings should be regarded with the same reverence as canonized scripture, for both are revelations of divine truth—one written by prophets, the other inscribed into the fabric of creation itself.

### 2.2. Special

While general revelation unfolds through the observable world, special revelation manifests through direct and personal experiences. These experiences can take many forms, including visions, dreams, trances, angelic visitations, entheogenic encounters, and moments of profound inspiration. Our tradition is filled with such accounts, such as Joseph Smith's First Vision in the Sacred Grove.

Unlike general revelation, which is accessible to all through reason and observation, special revelation is deeply personal and subjective. Since special revelation is personal and not universally verifiable, it carries a different weight than general revelation. It is often received within the context of faith communities and interpreted through theological and cultural lenses. While one person's vision may serve as a guiding light for many, others may see little value in it. Even within shared religious traditions, interpretations of divine experiences can vary widely, leading to diverse expressions of faith and belief.

The power of special revelation lies not just in the experience itself but in how it is communicated and received. Throughout history people have shared their revelations in ways that inspire and uplift, but also in ways that invite ethical reflection. As we explore revelation further, it is crucial to consider the responsibility that comes with claiming Divine insight. In the final section of this talk we will discuss the ethics of revelation—how to discern, share, and interpret these experiences in ways that are constructive, compassionate, and spiritually enriching.

## 3. The Ethics of Special Revelation

Despite revelation being such a foundational part of the Restoration, there is very little written about how to have ethical and responsible revelation. Since the gift of revelation is one that is given to all, it is especially pressing that this education be obtained.

The inability to determine what an ethical revelation looks like has led to some hurtful and downright violent acts to be done in the name of the Divine within Mormonism. Our founder, Joseph Smith Jr., also fell prey to his baser instincts and wielded revelation as a means to obtain what he wanted. For example:

- He told Martin Harris to sell his home to fund the Book of Mormon printing, and Harris was left without a home when the Book of Mormon was not a commercial success.
- He prevented everyone else from having revelations except him
- He claimed the Kirtland Safety Society was Divinely ordained (1) (2)
- He used revelation to get his followers to build him a mansion
- He used revelation to send husbands away so he could also use revelation to coerce their wives into marrying him.

Outside of our founder it has also been used for nefarious purposes, such as:

- W. Wallace Smith's revelation that called non-monogamous families inherently sinful (CoC D&C 150)
- The Restoration Church of Jesus Christ's revelation which non-consensually dissolved sealings between consenting adults and may have contributed to a suicide.
- Thomas S. Monson / Russell M. Nelson's revelation to enact the November Policy of Exclusion of LGBT people and their children which absolutely led to suicides.
- Ron Lafferty's revelation to murder his sister-in-law and infant niece

This may sound like I don't care for revelation; on the contrary I have written quite a few revelations and adore many that others have written. However, our tradition has clearly illustrated that the gift of revelation can be abused in the most horrific ways. This makes the need for an education on ethical and responsible revelation even more pressing.

I would like to propose several things to keep in mind when writing your own revelations:

1. **Check motives:** before writing your revelation, ask yourself why you are doing so. Revelation should never be used as a tool to claim dominion over another, as all people have access to the heavens and they can seek revelation for themselves. Instead, revelation should be a way of building community, helping all lead fulfilling lives, and be inclusive.
2. **Invite community discernment:** Share your drafts with your friends, and ask for their feedback. Allowing the community to take part in the revelatory process is a form of common consent. Welcome and accept insights, critiques, and revisions with humility.
3. **Root in Tradition and Service:** Our tradition is full of spiritual leaders - including and especially Jesus - who have conveyed many wise things to us. The best of what they have created centers the vulnerable and is anchored in service. See if your revelation does this as well.

4. **Consider the fruits:** Consider how your revelation will impact the community. Will it help people along their spiritual path, or will it create road blocks? Does it strengthen, comfort, and uplift others, or does it degrade and control others?

5. **Understand scope:** Your revelation, by definition, is a conceptual special revelation, and it is inseparably the product of you and your time period and culture. While it may be meaningful to you it may not be to everyone. Honor people's diversity of experience and belief.

6. **Brevity:** 2nd Nephi teaches "my soul delighteth in plainness: for after this manner doth the Lord God work among the children of men. For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding: for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding.", and it would be wise if your revelations did the same. If the message could be conveyed more concisely, explore doing so.

7. **Know the facts:** Having a revelation that the sky is actually purple does not make it so. Likewise, if you are unfamiliar with things such as Mesoamerican archeology, don't claim that you do through revelation. It is important to speak on things which are true and you have knowledge about.

8. **Consider your mental health:** Revelation - like any creative or intuitive process - is influenced by your mental and emotional state. If you are in a period of crisis, exhaustion, or instability, what feels like inspiration may be more about processing your own stress than offering something helpful for others. Pay attention to your well-being, and if needed, take time away from religion and spirituality to rest, reflect, or seek professional support. A healthy mind is better able to produce guidance for your community that is clear, constructive, and less likely to cause harm.

9. **Be honest when revising:** If you put your  revelation out there for people to read and then modify it later, that is perfectly acceptable, but you should note what changes you made to it.

These are the minimum ethical considerations to keep in mind when writing and claiming revelation. Beginning here will not prevent all abuses, but it will help mitigate the worst impulses and direct the revelation toward healing rather than harm.

If you feel called to write revelation, remember that you are claiming to give voice to Divinity on earth. To take up this calling is an act of profound courage and the birthright of the Restoration, but it is also an act of grave responsibility. When revelation is used to dominate, coerce, or deceive, it becomes the very definition of taking God’s name in vain. When it is rooted in humility, compassion, and service, however, revelation can be one of the greatest blessings our tradition offers.

The Restoration has shown us both the perils and the possibilities of special revelation. Let us choose the latter. May we be a people who approach revelation with care, who honor the Spirit’s voice without weaponizing it, and who use this gift to comfort, to liberate, and to build Zion among us.

# Closing prayer
# by Mars (she/they)

October 4th, 2025, Second Reform Mormon General Conference

Heavenly parents,

Thank you for this day and for all the days of the year that thou hast given us.

Please, in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, guide us to old truth and keep us throughout this day.

In thy name, Amen.