



A Peaceable People: Why Latter-day Saints Are Less Violent than the General Population

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Latter-day Saints are a notably peaceful people. What keeps their communities nonviolent?

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are often remarkably peaceful. Latter-day Saints have a reputation for being peaceful, law-abiding, and community-oriented. This isn't just anecdotal—it's borne out in crime statistics and sociological research.

For example, Utah, where a majority of the population identifies as Latter-day Saint, has consistently **lower violent crime rates** than **national averages**. More broadly, studies of Latter-day Saint communities outside Utah show **similarly low levels of violence** among Latter-day Saint youth. Universities run by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

Saints with overwhelmingly Latter-day Saint populations, BYU and BYU-Idaho, have [extraordinarily low rates of sexual assault](#). Boy Scout troops run by Latter-day Saints had [abuse rates 75% lower](#) than average.

But why? What is it about Latter-day Saint belief and practice that cultivates a culture of nonviolence?

The answer isn't just one thing—it's a combination of theological principles, strong community structures, social norms, and historical experiences that together create a culture where violence is rare. The numbers don't lie, and neither does the lived experience of those in Latter-day Saint communities. Let's take a look at what makes the Saints so peaceable.

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Theological Foundations: Turning the Other Cheek Isn't Optional

At the heart of the Latter-day Saint commitment to nonviolence is their religious belief system, which directly discourages aggression. The Book of Mormon explicitly condemns contention, stating that it is *"of the devil"* ([3 Nephi 11:29](#)). One of the most striking narratives in Latter-day Saint scripture tells of a group of converts who, after years of being warriors, covenant to never again take up arms—even at the cost of their own lives. Their faith leads them to value peace so deeply that they would rather die than fight ([Alma 24](#)).

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, particularly His command to *"love your enemies"* and *"turn the other cheek,"* is heavily emphasized in the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ. Church leaders continually reinforce the idea that contention is not of God. President Russell M. Nelson, current president of the Church, has called on Latter-day Saints to be *"peacemakers"* in a world increasingly prone to division and hostility. He explicitly warned that *"anger and violence can be contagious"* and called on members to *"choose to be civil and respectful even when others do not."*

Beyond simply avoiding violence, Latter-day Saints are expected to actively build peaceful communities. Their twelfth Article of Faith states, *"We believe in being subject to*

More people volunteer in Utah

kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law." This is memorized by many Latter-day Saint children and essentially sacralizes respect for legal authority. In addition, the *Book of Mormon*, in many ways, works as a handbook for avoiding the social and political conditions that generate violence.

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Community Structures: A Culture of Watchfulness and Care

One of the most unique aspects of Latter-day Saint life is its community structure. Congregations, known as wards, function almost like extended families, with a level of social engagement that is rare in modern American life. Members don't just see each other on Sundays; they interact multiple times a week through service projects, youth activities, and social gatherings. Every member is assigned *ministering brothers or sisters* who check in on them regularly. If someone starts exhibiting dangerous or self-destructive behavior, there's a built-in support system to intervene before things escalate.

Sociologists often point to *social capital* and *informal social control* as key deterrents to crime. One empirical indicator of this is Utah's extraordinary volunteerism and charitable engagement, which are byproducts of the LDS communal ethic. Utah consistently leads the nation in volunteer rates—**more people volunteer** in Utah and for more hours than in any other state.

Furthermore, the Church's lay leadership system means local congregational leaders (bishops) are intimately involved in members' lives and welfare. Bishops provide counseling, mediate disputes, and even coordinate financial or addiction recovery help through **church welfare programs**. For instance, if there's domestic strife in a home, a caring bishopric and Relief Society (women's organization) presidency might rally around that family, offering resources to defuse tension before it erupts harmfully. The Church also has explicit **policies and training to prevent abuse and violence**—leaders are taught to promptly address any abuse and even **involve law enforcement as needed**. All of this amounts to a robust safety net of intervention that can catch and correct potentially violent situations early on.

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Economic Stability & Welfare

A significant factor contributing to the lower violence rates among Latter-day Saints is the Church's comprehensive welfare system. Established in 1936, this private, church-run safety net provides food, housing assistance, job training, and direct financial aid to struggling members through programs like Bishops' Storehouses, fast offerings, and employment services. Unlike government programs, this welfare model operates at the local level, with bishops personally assessing and responding to individual needs, ensuring that members avoid extreme poverty and economic desperation—[key risk factors for criminal behavior](#).

This system has a measurable impact on crime prevention. Studies have long established a link between economic hardship and criminal behavior, [particularly theft and violent crime](#). By intervening early with financial and employment assistance, the Church of Jesus Christ's welfare program mitigates conditions that often push individuals toward illegal activity.

Lifestyle Norms: Sobriety, Stability, and Self-Mastery

Another major factor in the low levels of violence among Latter-day Saints is their lifestyle. The *Word of Wisdom*, the Church's health code, prohibits alcohol and drug use. This has significant implications for crime rates, as substance abuse is a major driver of violent crime. Statistics show that Utah has some of the [lowest rates of alcohol](#)

consumption in the country, and studies have consistently found lower levels of substance abuse among Latter-day Saints than among the general population. Fewer people under the influence means fewer instances of alcohol-fueled aggression and crime.

Family structure also plays a crucial role. Latter-day Saints place a strong emphasis on marriage and family stability. Utah has one of the highest marriage rates and one of the lowest rates of single-parent households in the nation. Research shows that children raised in stable, two-parent homes are significantly less likely to engage in violent behavior. Latter-day Saint teachings on family life contribute to an environment where youth are less likely to fall into patterns of delinquency.

Historical Memory: A People Who Know the Cost of Violence

Latter-day Saints have a historical memory shaped by persecution. In the 19th century, they were driven from their homes multiple times, subjected to violent attacks, and even massacred. This traumatic history of persecution left a deep imprint. The pioneers who eventually settled in Utah had learned through bitter experience that violence only begets suffering. There, they developed a strong collective desire to live peacefully and *not* give enemies any pretext to attack again.

To be fair, early LDS history also contains some regrettable episodes of Latter-day Saints *committing* violence, such as the 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre. These incidents, while comparatively rare to neighboring communities and complex in context, were brutally instructive as well, prompting later leaders to distance the faith from any form of vigilantism or aggression. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, church leadership firmly established that Latter-day Saints would be a law-abiding people, seeking redress of grievances through courts and government rather than violence.

Collective memory reinforces the community's modern rejection of mob mentality, lawlessness, or violent revenge.

This historical transition was not just top-down; it became part of Latter-day Saint identity. The narrative of a once-persecuted people who survived by clinging to their faith and staying unified in spite of violence is a **cultural memory** passed down through

generations. It engenders sympathy for other oppressed groups and a wariness of rhetoric that could lead to violence. Many Latter-day Saints recount stories of their pioneer ancestors being beaten or chased out by mobs, and these stories serve as stark cautionary tales. The echo of those events in collective memory reinforces the community's modern rejection of mob mentality, lawlessness, or violent revenge.

Moreover, as Latter-day Saints increasingly became part of the American mainstream in the 20th century, church leaders encouraged members to be exemplary citizens to overcome past stigmas. This meant being *modelly nonviolent*—no rioting, no extremism, just *hardworking, neighborly folk*. Even during times of national turmoil (the civil rights era, anti-war protests, etc.), the Latter-day Saint population, by and large, kept to peaceful civic engagement.

For Sure, Other Factors Matter Too

To be sure, not every gap in violence between Latter-day Saints and the general population can be chalked up to theology or church influence alone. Other factors include that Latter-day Saints in America are more likely than the general population to be middle-class, and reside in suburban or rural areas. These groups and areas tend to have lower violent crime rates nationwide, regardless of religion. It's possible that the kind of individuals prone to serious violence are less likely to be attracted to, or retained in, the Latter-day Saint faith in the first place. Some of the most notable examples of violence in Utah, for example, are among those who left or were disfellowshipped from the Church. We should also note that devout participation in **any** faith community often [correlates with lower crime](#).

A Model Worth Noticing

The Latter-day Saint case offers valuable insights into what makes a community safe. Strong families, tight-knit social networks, clear moral teachings, and disciplined living all contribute to a culture where violence is rare. In an era where many are searching for solutions to crime and social unrest, the Latter-day Saints provide an intriguing case study of how values and community structures can foster peace.

The takeaway? Culture matters. Beliefs matter. And when a community prioritizes peace—not just in words but in action—it makes a real difference. Latter-day Saints have built

a society where violence is the exception, not the rule. And that's something worth learning from.

About the author



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