

When Doubts and Questions Arise: Church History and European Saints

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Introduction

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Good morning, it is a delight to be with you today to talk about Church history and the European Saints. In my presentation I am going to provide a provisional progress report of recent developments that have taken place to support Latter-day Saints in Europe to access and engage with Church history, particularly for those who have doubts or questions about the faith, including the Church's origins, leaders, and subsequent development. First, I will begin by outlining some of my involvement in Church history before providing context on the Church in Europe. I will then provide several examples of the various efforts that have taken place with respect to Church history in Europe over the last five years.

I was baptized a Latter-day Saint in 2006. As a 16-year-old I was probably unusual in my interest in life after death and the purpose of life. In the late 1990s, my family had begun association with the Church before cooling off and moving to a different area of our town in South West England. In the early 2000s, when my sister turned twelve, the Ward Young Women's President visited our home and invited her to attend youth activities. Eventually I invited myself to Church activities and events and subsequently began taking missionary lessons, which were mostly led by European missionaries. Prior to this I had very little in the way of religious instruction. My divorced parents had gone down different paths. My father had recently become a Baptist while my mother remained agnostic. Other than some occasional Sunday School classes as a child and typical state religious education there was no religious training or belief passed down to me from my family. After three years of investigating the Church and several particularly strong spiritual experiences from reading the Book of Mormon I had what I needed to make the decision to convert.

Two years after my baptism I began serving as a full-time missionary in the England Manchester Mission, which sits at the heart of the Church's history in the British Isles. During a mission tour of historical sites including Preston, Downham, and Liverpool, I was captivated by the legacy of the Church and committed myself to researching more about it. Little was I to know that several of my fellow missionaries that I was sat next to would resign their membership in just a couple of years in part over various issues relating to the history of the Church.¹

Later that year I finished my mission and commenced my studies at Lancaster University where I would go on to complete my undergraduate and postgraduate history degrees. I soon married and much to my wife's feigned delight, I spent many hours researching and writing about Church history in Europe and the British Isles specifically. Soon a website and Facebook group followed as I sought to share my discoveries with friends and fellow Church members. Several months after our marriage I was called as a Bishop's counsellor and there had some of my first experiences of working one-on-one with people to strengthen their faith. Later, while serving on other Bishoprics and High Councils, I had other opportunities to minister to those who were having doubts or questions about the Church.

People vary considerably in the extent to which they have doubts or questions about the Church and its history. In 2016, my wife and I were called to serve as the Communications Directors for the 2017 British Pageant, which proved to be a remarkable experience that helped thousands of Latter-day Saints to connect with Church history. It also allowed us to interview, address, and discuss Church history topics and events with members across the country. During that time, we met people who were earnestly looking for answers to questions they had about the origins of the Church and its early history. I soon came to appreciate that helping others to re-engage in the Church and overcome issues relating to Church history could not be solved by intellectual discussions and the dispensing of knowledge alone. Reconversion and stabilization required spiritual groundings along with unconditional love and patience.

More recently, in January this year I moved my family to Utah from our home in England to work as a Historian for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints working on the *Saints* project. Family, friends, and fellow Church members were excited for our big adventure. It was and remains a big change for us. Little was I to know that shortly after arriving we would find ourselves facing a pandemic, be shaken by an earthquake, and experience civil unrest. My Saintly wife, who struggles to understand my infatuation with Church history, has been remarkable in her long-suffering with my research into nineteenth and twentieth century Church history.

So now a few words on the Church in Europe.

¹ Gregory A. Prince, 'Faith and Doubt as Partners in Mormon History,' 19th annual Arrington Lecture (2013), p. 15.

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I. European Demographics and Church Presence

While the future stability of Europe is uncertain in the face of various geo-political pressures, the continent has enjoyed a relatively stable and prosperous seventy years or so, particularly in the last thirty years. This 'Long Peace,' as it is referred to as, has previously been identified as the result of the intertwining of military and economic institutions between countries.² Supranational organizations and increasingly globalized societies has for some people eroded the prospect of another large intracontinental conflict.

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The European continent has some 830 million people and there is a high degree of wealth, albeit somewhat unequally distributed across and within countries. Of the European population 727 million or 87.7 per cent are internet users and 41.1 per cent of the total population use Facebook with other forms of social media also widely used. While there are some stark contrasts between West, Central, and East Europe, access to information is made possible through high literacy rates and access to print and digital information. There are, however, notable challenges with language and it has been estimated that more than 200 languages are spoken across the continent, which largely comes as a by-product of immigration.

Secularism and religious disaffection are factors that have contributed to decreased interest and participation in religious organizations.³ Nonetheless, there is widespread religious freedom and the historical challenges facing the Church and its operations in most European countries have largely been resolved. No longer are members mobbed and attacked for attending worship services.

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Across Europe the Church has over 500,000 members in some 1,500 congregations.⁴ Membership and congregational growth is often cyclical in most European countries.⁵ For example, the introduction of a centers of strength model in Europe has seen a decrease in national penetration by missionaries and Church congregations, but it has resulted in higher youth retention, seminary and institute enrolment, and progress in other key areas. As my

² Lawrence Freedman, 'Stephen Pinker and the long peace: alliance, deterrence and decline,' *Cold War History*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2014), p. 659, DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2014.950243

³ Fred Edwards, 'Faith and FAITHLESSNESS by Generation: The Decline and Rise are Real,' *The Humanist*, (2018), pp. 22-25.

⁴ 2019 official statistics from the Church Newsroom

⁵ Darrell Richard Jackson, 'The state of the churches in Europe,' *Review and Expositor*, Vol. 115, No. 2 (2018), pp. 157-174.

colleague Jed Woodworth noted just recently about religious cyclical observances in North America:

“In the 1790s, Methodist circuit riders in upstate New York complained that locals, having freed themselves from Puritan morality, had become a “Sabbath-breaking, irreligious race...” Less than a quarter of the county’s adults then belonged to a church. A generation later, upstate New York was the center of the Sabbath-keeping, church-attending Second Great Awakening. The same phenomenon can be observed closer to our own times. In the late 1960s, the United States seemed to be tearing apart at the seams as many Baby Boomers forsook conventional morality for sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll. But by 1980, many in this same cohort, having joined the Moral Majority, voted for the buttoned-up Ronald Reagan. History is not always a declension narrative.”⁶

Being in a minority can inevitably cause some difficulties and challenges. This remains true for Latter-day Saints and those seeking to live the standards and teachings of the Church. Membership attrition can occur through insufficient support with social and economic opportunities at times limited through prejudice and ignorance.

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As Jan Shipps has previously noted:

“For today’s European converts...Everything depends on one’s own resources, insofar as these can be acquired through spiritual experiences and reinforced in the normally small LDS communities. European Saints today who remain faithful and active are indeed a tough breed.”⁷

As such, there has been, as former Church Historian Elder Marlin K. Jensen has noted, a falling away of some Saints who have come into contact with elements of Church history that they were either uninformed about, had been presented to them in a false or watered down manner, or was severely outdated.⁸ I have met many wonderful people who have struggled with reconciling their understanding of Church history with what they discover on the internet or from other mediums. Previous studies have identified the role that issues with Church history can play in the deconversion experience of Latter-day Saints.⁹ Fortunately, I

⁶ Jed Woodworth, ‘Faith and Doubt among the Saints,’ *Mormon Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2020), p. 205.

⁷ Jan Shipps, ‘Seeking a “Second Harvest”’: Controlling the Costs of LDS Membership in Europe,’ *Dialogue: A Journal Of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2008), p. 8.

⁸ Peter Henderson, Kristina Cooke, ‘Special report -Mormonism besieged by the modern age,’ *Reuters*, January 30, 2012, available at: <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mormonchurch/special-report-mormonism-besieged-by-the-modern-age-idUKTRE80T1CP20120130>, [date accessed: July 29, 2020].

⁹ See Traci K. Burnett, ‘This Was the Place: Apostasy from the LDS Church,’ Utah State University, Master’s thesis, (2012).

have seen some of these people make steps to return to association with and activity in the Church.

Another former Church Historian, Elder Steven E. Snow, also grappled with this issue during his time in the department. A guiding element of his tenure was to provide the Saints with the best information available. As Elder Snow once noted:

"The young people, particularly, they'll get on one site, and they'll say, 'Well, I didn't ever hear that, and then that'll lead them to another. And they just keep going. And then there's this credibility issue that begins about, 'What else is the church hiding?' Well, we're not hiding anything. ... I think in this day and age it's become apparent that we really do need to provide a series of answers that will help our members better understand these chapters of our history."¹⁰

Progress has continued to be made in this area over the subsequent years with the release of new records, publications, the translation of materials, and a decentralizing Church history department. Nonetheless, there are those who encounter aspects of the Church's history that troubles them to the point of resigning their membership or suspending active participation in the faith.¹¹

With high levels of literacy, education, and internet access amongst Europeans it is of little surprise to see some members encountering ideas, materials, and articles that both support and challenge their faith, particular due to the secular nature of most of the societies.¹² These experiences within religious movements are not unique to Latter-day Saints. Ultra-Orthodox Jews and other Christian denominations are experiencing similar patterns of behavior.¹³

Nonetheless, European Saints in their largely secular societies have persistently and consistently lived the gospel. My daughters are fourth generation Latter-day Saints on their mother's side and in some cases, there are seventh and eighth generation Latter-day Saint families in the British Isles.¹⁴ As such, a mature and well-established presence has emerged in many areas of Europe despite the relentless march of irreligiosity, apathy, and secularism. The challenges brought about by the rise of the internet

¹⁰ Tad Walch, 'LDS Church enhances web pages on its history, doctrine,' *Deseret News*, December 9, 2013, <https://www.deseret.com/2013/12/9/20531144/lds-church-enhances-web-pages-on-its-history-doctrine#0>, [date accessed: July 15, 2020].

¹¹ Amorette Hinderaker & Amy O'Connor, 'The Long Road Out: Exit Stories from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,' *Communication Studies*, Vol. 66, No. 5 (2015), p. 518.

¹² Lucy Lee, 'Religion: losing faith?' in Alison Park, Elizabeth Clery, John Curtice, Miranda Phillips, & David Utting, *British Social Attitudes Survey: British social attitudes 28* (London: Sage Publications, 2012), pp. 173-184.

¹³ Ayala Fader, 'Ultra-Orthodox Jewish interiority, the Internet, and the crisis of faith,' *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2017), pp. 185-206, and Scot McKnight and Hauna Ondrey, *Finding Faith, Losing Faith: Stories of Conversion and Apostasy* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), p. 54.

¹⁴ 'Early Mormon History in Wales,' *Church of Jesus Christ Newsroom – UK*, August 1, 2017, available at: <https://news-gb.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/early-mormon-history-in-wales>, [date accessed: July 29, 2020].

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II. Resource Availability

It is important to note that while Europeans are generally privileged in their access to Church history resources and information there are difficulties and barriers that persist.

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I will use several examples to demonstrate some of the issues that the Saints face when trying to understand or explore Church history and other faith affirming literature for the doubting or questioning Saint. One of the main barriers is cost. First, I will take Patrick Mason's *Planted*, which is a great read and I lent my copy to several friends, some of whom had doubts and questions about the Church. In the United States it would set you back about \$16 for a new paperback copy whereas for a Saint in France and Spain it is almost \$34 and for a Saint in the United Kingdom it is about \$28. Second, is Laura Harris Hales' edited volume *A Reason for Faith*, which provides a series of valuable essays on topics of contemporary interest to members. A hardback copy in the United States will cost you \$25 whereas for France, the UK, and Spain it ranges between \$40-\$50 a copy. On top of this we must remember that there is often a much longer delivery time and higher postage costs. Secondhand copies are also not as freely available as they seem to be generally limited to the Intermountain West. Consider then the further disadvantages with respect to cost and access for those living in less privileged European countries and in other global locations. Access to good quality print materials is made more difficult for Europeans due to higher costs.

International standard shipping for the likes of Deseret Book can often supersede the price of a physical book. The handful of shops in Europe that can offer Latter-day Saint books often have to charge far higher prices due to a smaller market and the related import costs. There can also be significant wait times. For example, currently it takes up to 35 days for a copy of *Insights from a Prophet's Life* from the only shop in the UK to offer Latter-day Saint books and it is more expensive too. Matthew Brown's *A Pillar of Light* is modestly priced at \$16.99 at Deseret Book, but standard international shipping to the UK comes to \$21.90, more than the price of the book. In many cases this extra cost would dissuade potential European customers. One possible solution is to allow European distribution centers to offer a broader range of literature and to include Religious Study Center publications amongst others.

There are of course several equalizing factors. The Church Historian's Press is a real boon to the Saints seeking to access historical materials concerning the Church as costs are equitable across the different country stores. For example, to purchase *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* in various international locations is almost exactly comparable to what American members pay. Additionally, the free shipping removes another barrier for the Saints. Crucial resources, such as the *Saints* books, are also priced equitably, made available for free in digital

format, and are translated into 14 languages. Truly, the launch of the Church Historians Press in 2008 has been a blessing for the European Saints.

In Europe there has, at least until the recent pandemic, continued to be a tendency to prefer physical copies of a book rather than eBooks. Worldwide it was estimated that eBooks comprised 18-20% of total book sales.¹⁵ Europeans are increasingly turning to e-books as one way of accessing materials, but this far from being a widespread occurrence. Greater adoption, advertisement, and promulgation of electronic publications will go a long way to aid European Saints in accessing many of the excellent books being published. Similarly, the *Saints* and *First Vision* podcasts have enabled the Saints to access and absorb information about the Church's history. Additional faith affirming podcasts containing historical materials published by the Church would be of merit to key demographics.

Still, there are issues with the sharing of information and networking. How does a European Latter-day Saint become aware of new publications? I have been fortunate to meet and work with many international scholars and engage in online and in-person discussions, but many lay members and leaders are not as connected to such information networks. Official publications are announced through ecclesiastical lines and made available through tools such as the Gospel Library, but what of the wider body of scholarship that could prove invaluable to those with questions and doubts? And what scope is there for Europeans to publish their work through publishers that specialize in Latter-day Saint history? These are issues and questions that remain to be grappled with. Nonetheless, the availability of resources remains an issue in Europe for many Saints and remains a luxury for those with the ability to pay higher than standard prices for a book, if they are even aware of it.

One of the most underutilized resources available internationally are the Country Sites.

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Each country has its own website that members and non-members can use to access local information and news. In the case of the United Kingdom (UK) an official Church website was operating by at least 1998. In this example from 2001 the history of the Church is placed front and center. In most cases the sites are occasionally updated with content pulled from central newsrooms or with short stories written by in-country public affairs specialists. For me this seems like a venue that can be significantly developed to provide a valuable indigenous resource with content that is tailored to the needs of Saints in particular countries.

The difficulties facing European Saints regarding the availability of resources privileges the wealthier and better-connected Saints – many of whom are likely to be well-established and

¹⁵ Amy Watson, 'E-books – Statistics & Facts,' *Statista*, December 18, 2018, available at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/1474/e-books/>, [date accessed: July 15, 2020].

multi-generational Latter-day Saints. The situation makes it difficult for the young and recently converted to necessarily access faith affirming material.

In her study of Latter-day Saint exit experiences, Amorette Hindaker found that in every case there was a period wherein doubting Saints began researching literature and materials.¹⁶ For Latter-day Saint scholars in a worldwide faith there is scope to better ensure resources are accessible to the membership to support those experiencing doubts and questions. Translation, therefore, is paramount in the future expansion of placing faith affirming materials in the hands of Saints.

I remember shortly after I joined the Church, I was given a talk assignment. As I was preparing, I began looking for a faith promoting story to share, but I could only find early convert pioneers with a limited amount of content related to the British Isles. In 2018, I wanted to try and tackle the barriers facing Church members from accessing Church history stories and resources relating to the British Isles. I also wanted to inform and expose the Saints to a wide range of stories, including those from more recent years. At that time, I began working with the UK and Ireland website administrator to create a Church history area on the website. After some discussions we developed several sections where local historical stories could be stored and made available to the Saints.

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In conjunction with the communications team these stories are reviewed by historians, processed, verified, and edited before being published for the Saints and interested persons to read and share on social media. Simultaneously, many of these stories were then included in the local pages of the *Ensign* to reach additional readers.

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The result is a respectable collection of British stories, a more engaged Latter-day Saint audience, and a developing local capacity amongst specialists and other members to discuss and produce Church history.

This development was made possible through the additional support of the UK and Ireland Church history Committee and the UK and Ireland Public Affairs Team.

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III. Church History Committees

In 2017 a Church History Committee for the United Kingdom and Ireland (initially called a Council) was established. The committee met for the first time in Chorley, Lancashire, that

¹⁶ Amorette Hindaker, 'Severing Primary Ties: Exit From Totalistic Organizations,' *Western Journal of Communication*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (2015), pp. 103-104.

October. The expectations of the committee members varied somewhat, but at the heart was a desire to strengthen the faith of the Saints.

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As was noted in the historical record:

“[They hoped to bring] Church history alive, creat[e] increased opportunities to collaborate with auxiliaries and other Church departments, increas[e] the capacity to impact people’s lives for good and rekindl[e] the spark of the gospel in less active members.”

The Committee is led by a Church History Country Advisor and is composed of Church History Specialists from across the country who meet twice a year. Agenda items include oral history projects, exhibitions, special projects, and training. A key function of the committee is to provide support to Church history Specialists and to build capacity amongst them to effectively work with Stake and Ward leaders with respect to Church history. These men and women are trained in the resources developed by the Church in addition to developing their own. They take the lead in promoting engagement with Church history across the country and support the Stakes in recording their history and giving presentations to members.

As my fellow committee member Jill Morgan noted: “The Church history council was formed so the individual efforts of Church history specialists around the country could be coordinated and larger projects could be undertaken.”¹⁷ This observation has now repeatedly been manifest over the last few years. I should point out that all this work is completed by members as one of their Church callings with minimal financial implications. Now, I would like to give one example of how the UK and Ireland Church history Committee used European Church history to help those who have doubts and questions.

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IV. Church Building Program

Elder Marlin K. Jensen noted the following in 2012:

“History in its most basic form is a record of people and their lives, and from those lives come stories and lessons that can reinforce what we believe, what we stand for, and what we should do in the face of adversity. Not all the stories that make up our history are of the epic nature of Joseph Smith’s First Vision or of Wilford

¹⁷ Jill Morgan, ‘Church History Council Established for the UK and Ireland,’ *Church of Jesus Christ*, August 24, 2018, available at: <https://uk.churchofjesuschrist.org/church-history-council-established-for-the-uk-and-ireland?lang=eng-gb>, [date accessed: July 15, 2020].

Woodruff's mission to England. In fact, some truly remarkable stories come from the lives of very ordinary Latter-day Saints, which most of us are."¹⁸

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By the late 1950s, Church membership in the British Isles was rapidly accelerating. While the dedication of the London Temple had significantly curtailed emigration the Saints continued to meet in sub-par meeting places. Most British Church members can trace their family's association with the Church to the 1960s onwards. However, subsequent generations are unaware of the sacrifices that were required in those formative days when persecution still existed and the conditions that members met in.

In 2017, I was asked to assist with a project to document the Church Building Program that began in the British Isles in 1961. Hundreds of young men and young women were called as Building Missionaries. Most were recent converts and in their teens. From across the country they were called and set apart to build chapels and administer the program. Building supervisors and members of the Church Building Committee headquartered in Salt Lake City were temporarily assigned to Europe to oversee construction.

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Many of these men and women are still alive and active in the Church, but some have subsequently left the faith. Our small team went about gathering resources and records relating to the period and dozens of oral histories were conducted. We received photographs, scrapbooks, letters, stories, and even hammers and tool belts from their days as a building missionary. With many now aged in their 70s and 80s we sought to preserve their stories of faith and sacrifice. Regardless of their current activity and membership status we reached out and were rewarded with great interest and appreciation.

For years some of them had felt as if they had served a second-rate mission. Despite having served for two years or more their service was not reflected on their membership records. These were Saints whose efforts were at risk of being forgotten by the wider membership, despite most chapels in the UK being built by members and missionaries.

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In 2018 we announced that we would hold a reunion for the building missionaries. It was designed as a tribute to their efforts, to allow them to see one another again after many years, and to further document their stories.

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¹⁸ Marlin K. Jensen, "Stand in the Sacred Grove," Church Educational System devotional, May 6, 2012; [lds.org/broadcasts](https://www.lds.org/broadcasts).

Presentations, workshops, exhibitions, activities, food, entertainment, and touching stories were shared on the day of the reunion and people from across the world came together to remember their time as building missionaries. We also had former missionaries who had left the Church decades ago who came along to see their old companions and fellow missionaries. Some had not seen each other for more than fifty years. A testimony meeting was held the next day and touching words were shared.

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During the reunion there were Church Builders I spoke to who said they had just never felt right after their missions. They had come across things concerning the Church that had caused them to doubt their testimony and even their faith in God. The reunion and related historical activities were therefore also missionary opportunities that facilitated discussions concerning doubts and questions they had.

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That one event did not fix the concerns that less active and former members had, but it was an opportunity to have them in a chapel and to have conversations with Church history specialists and experienced Church leaders. The missionaries renewed connections and the reunion continues to bear fruit today as we have less-active members continuing to reach out and engage with us.

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V. Challenges and Opportunities in Europe

In 2004, at the age of 82, Elder L. Tom Perry was asked to travel to Europe to serve as President of the Europe Central Area.¹⁹

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As he prepared for the assignment, he had a profound revelation. Of the experience he said:

“During a sleepless night I had an impression that the young adults were the future of the Church in Europe and I needed to focus on them. It turned out to be one of the most rewarding periods of my long ministry. Some very satisfying results have occurred during the last few years as we have listened to your ideas and concerns.”²⁰

In late 2003 and early 2004, under an initiative started by Elder Marlin K. Jensen, who was then the Europe Area President, four institute outreach centers, which were later known as Young Single Adult Centers, were opened in Europe namely in Copenhagen, Denmark, and

¹⁹ Elder L. Tom Perry, ‘We Were the Greatest Generation,’ BYU Speeches, March 6, 2011, available at: <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/l-tom-perry/greatest-generation/>, [date accessed: July 15, 2020].

²⁰ Ibid

in the German cities of Berlin, Hamburg, and. The centers were an extension of the institute program and aimed at providing a setting wherein YSA members and non-members could socialize, take institute classes, and meet other people their age.

Elder Perry expanded and enhanced the program and it was soon rolled out across Europe. A senior missionary couple would provide support for the young adults and along with a YSA Center President would work to socialize, reactive, engage, and provide support for the array of young single adults, ranging from students to graduates, and working professionals.

One senior missionary involved in a center in France described the mission to a YSA Center as follows:

“Our job will be to set up a Center that will provide a place for young people, members and non-members alike, to congregate, to have FHE, institute classes, activities, games, service projects, etc. It will be a place of studying, of learning gospel principles, and a place where the spirit will be felt. It will be a place where the youth will feel love and will be comfortable. They will learn to be worthy, productive, moral, and useful adults. They will learn to love the Lord and to feel His spirit.”²¹

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As an awkward recently returned missionary in 2010, I was called to serve as a Young Single Adult Center President for two Stakes in North West England. There was an institute enrolment of over 100 and a YSA sacrament meeting was held once a month. Weekly lessons and activities were held on the Preston England Temple site and there was much good done. This included the commencement of a yearly ‘Temple Convention,’ where the typical social and cultural activities were supplemented by participation in temple ordinances and spiritually minded workshops.

In this role I interacted with several young people undergoing a faith crisis, some of which was brought about by the increased use and availability of resources, discussions, and social content on the internet.²² Several times I discussed topics with young single adult men and women who had come across things such as the Mormon Stories Podcast or the exMormon reddit forum. The staging of the Book of Mormon musical in March 2011 generated renewed interest in how the Church was viewed by those inside and outside of the faith. When Elder Jensen came to speak at the Preston Stake Conference in June 2012 several of these YSA were able to attend. Some of them benefited from it, while others did not.

Still, the setting was not suitable for some of the YSA in Europe. There were freshly turned 18-year-olds, recent converts, and then there was also older YSA who were completing

²¹ Natalie Arhets, ‘Our Calling,’ *A Field of Blessings*, December 21, 2008, available at: <http://afieldofblessings.blogspot.com/2008/12/our-calling.html>, [date accessed: July 30, 2020].

²² Amorette Hinderaker, ‘Leaving Mormonism,’ in Daniel Enstedt, Göran Larsson, and Teemu T. Mantsinen, eds., *Handbook of Leaving Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), p. 203.

advanced degrees in the humanities, arts, sciences, and other fields. With a relatively small institute and only a modest selection of classes it meant there were significant differences in the depth of class discussion, particularly in the Church history and Doctrine class. Some felt it was too intellectual and high-level whereas others felt it was not enough.

As such, while the Centers successfully met the social needs of most YSA they struggled to fully cater to the intellectual needs of all YSA. Access to advanced academic scholarship, historical resources, and the forums to discuss issues with non-judgmental experienced and faithful Latter-day Saints are needed to help those who have questions and doubts. After my stint as a YSA center president I realized that while the centers played an important function something else was needed.

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VI. If Sunday School or Institute is not the right place, where is?

This leads me to my final point of how Church history has been used to strengthen European Saints. In an interview with PBS in 2006 Elder Jensen noted the importance of doubt and questioning. Of that subject he said:

“...if you're honest and if you're really a true seeker -- if you're not just a skeptic sitting back and taking potshots at everything and everybody and their philosophy of life -- I think it tends to bring one to a deeper seeking, and I hope that's what my doubts have done. They've caused me, I think, to study and to ponder and to compare and in the long run to become even more convinced that the way I've chosen, the way that came to me early in Germany, is the right way.”²³

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For some conversations Sunday School and Institute Classes are just not the appropriate or suitable venues. In 2016 some of the first steps were taken to accommodate young adults in Europe who needed alternative venues to talk, network, and process what they were thinking and feeling, particularly in relation to Church history. In December of that year, the first EuroSeminar was held at the BYU London Center. Sponsored by The Wheatley Institution, Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, International Center for Law and Religion Studies, BYU Law School, and the BYU London Centre, forty participants from eighteen countries gathered for three days of presentations, discussions, and small-group sessions. Presentations were also made by Area Authorities including the Europe Area President.

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²³ Marlin K. Jensen, interview for 'The Mormons,' March 7, 2006, PBS, available at: <https://www.pbs.org/mormons/interviews/jensen.html>, [date accessed: July 29, 2020].

Various topics, including Church history, were presented, and discussed by participants. While most of those in attendance were active Latter-day Saints not all were. Latter-day Saint academics from various institutions and organizations attended and facilitated discussions with those present.

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The EuroSeminar has been repeated several times and been expanded to South America. Most recently there was a seminar in Prague, Czech Republic, in July 2019. The objective of the EuroSeminar is noble, timely, and appreciated by the participants.

“To enable young Latter-day Saints from Europe to meet in an intellectually stimulating climate and explore together how religious faith can be an active part of living in European society.”

It is in these settings that more challenging topics or personal views can be shared in smaller, more intimate settings. Furthermore, it is in precisely this kind of environment that faith can be nurtured, doubts addressed, and the flickering flame of testimony fanned.

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One of the projects that really emerged from the EuroSeminars was the British and European Association of Mormon Scholars (BEAMS). BEAMS was specifically targeted at European Latter-day Saints involved in academia. There is an unfortunate tendency for many graduate students or earlier career professionals who end up leaving the Church. In my conversations with some of these people there is a tension between their intellectually informed worldview and their frustrations with the Church. BEAMS was one way of bringing together Latter-day Saints involved in academia and to form a network where discussions on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could occur in a rigorous yet ultimately faith affirming manner. The BEAMS symposiums allow what has turned out to be largely secondary research projects in relation to the Church to be shared to an academic audience of Latter-day Saint professors, students, and professional staff. With small funding grants from the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and BYU London Centre, several events were held at Oxford University, Lancaster University, and in other venues. Refreshments and travel bursaries were offered to scholars from different European countries. This small investment yielded rich rewards for participants.

It is precisely in these settings that Saints can openly talk about and discuss topics and issues that are perhaps best addressed outside of a lesson environment. The ability to engage in more personal conversations with faithful active Latter-day Saints can assuage concerns that they are unable to discuss their concerns, doubts, or questions.

There are other promising developments for European Latter-day Saints who want to find answers and engage in Church history. The continued development of the Global Mormon Studies network, which seeks to “introduce[e] our work, shar[e] resources, collaborat[e] and consult, and educat[e] about the significance of Mormonism as a global religious phenomenon.²⁴ Supporting young global scholars is one way that local capacity can be developed to help retain and strengthen members. In-person meetings and digital connections helps individuals to experience a form of networked religion. Instant communication, a flattened hierarchy, and access to new information makes previously unrealized connections possible.²⁵ Those who often felt on the margins in their regular Church meetings are now able to experience a sense of community as they engage in discussions about their faith and its history in a manner and level that they crave.

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Conclusion

Doubts and questions will inevitably arise as we navigate our mortal probation. For Latter-day Saints, some of these issues will arise in relation to the origins of the faith. In Europe there is a cadre of faithful Latter-day Saints who are genuinely seeking to help other Saints engage in Church history and find answers to questions. They seek to help support young Latter-day Saints who feel unable to discuss their questions with those immediately around them.

From the inception of the Church its history was one way of bringing good to the Church and particularly for the rising generation. As noted in the Doctrine and Covenants:

“Nevertheless, let my servant John Whitmer travel many times from place to place, and from church to church, that he may the more easily obtain knowledge— Preaching and expounding, writing, copying, selecting, and obtaining all things which shall be for the good of the church, and for the rising generations that shall grow up on the land of Zion, to possess it from generation to generation, forever and ever.”²⁶

The prior concentration of personnel, resources, and attention in one central location, in this case Utah, has been necessary from an operational point of view, but it has left the global Church membership somewhat disempowered from participating in and owning their own Church history. A worldwide faith requires a worldwide approach to recording and telling its story. The decentralization of certain operations has in some part begun to restore a sense of balance for international members. While there are improvements to be made, this process of decentralization offers crucial benefits both to the Church and to its membership. If we

²⁴ Global Mormon Studies Network, ‘Welcome,’ available at: <https://www.globalmormonstudies.org/>, [date accessed: July 29, 2020].

²⁵ Heidi A. Campbell, ‘Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society,’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (2012), pp. 67-68.

²⁶ D&C 69:7-8

are to counter anti-faith affirming materials it is vital that we cultivate local level engagement with Church history and more fully embed it into the mindset of members to inoculate them from the notion that things have been hidden from them. Similarly, by developing local capacity there is a stronger base of members and leaders who can work and support those struggling with doubts or questions about Church history. Having most of the world experts on Church history in one location can bring about much good, but how much more could be done if properly distributed globally, especially in a digital age.

If, as Elder Perry suggests, the young adults are the future of the Church in Europe, we must provide them with additional resources, opportunities, and contacts to engage with Church history. Resources such as the Gospel Topics Essays have already proven invaluable in providing clear insights into difficult topics and defenses of troubling questions.²⁷ To combine the growing body of resources with a decentralized trained Church History Specialist force can be of significant long-term value. Continuing to support initiatives such as the EuroSeminars and BEAMS are other means of strengthening and building capacity.

Finally, if we can learn anything from the last few years is that the work of the Lord continues to unfold and expand across the world. As we have seen with the associated blessings in the expansion of Stakes, Seminaries, and Temples, we too will see tremendous improvements in our ability to protect youth and assuage investigators concerns as Church history operations and awareness continue to expand and develop globally. While grappling with doubts and questions is inevitably a personal experience, having resources and local capacity to support people through these difficulties will go some way to fulfilling the Saviors injunction to nurture others. For as he declared, “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”²⁸ Thank you very much.

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²⁷ Tad Walch, ‘LDS Church enhances web pages on its history, doctrine,’ *Deseret News*, December 9, 2013, <https://www.deseret.com/2013/12/9/20531144/lds-church-enhances-web-pages-on-its-history-doctrine#0>, [date accessed: July 15, 2020].

²⁸ Luke 22:32