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11 Surprising Things You Didn't Know About Mormons



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Mormons have become firmly embedded in the national consciousness this summer with the emergence of not one but two Mormon presidential candidates in the 2012 Republican field — a surprising fact given that most Americans still associate the religion with sister wives. Nearly a quarter of voters say they wouldn't [vote for a Mormon president](#).

Outside of electoral politics, Mormons are suddenly ubiquitous. *The Book of Mormon*, a major Broadway musical from South Park creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker, cleaned up at the Tonys last week with nine awards. Mormon convert Glenn Beck is preparing to break out on his own at the end of the month and tweens are still devouring Mormon Stephanie Lee Meyers's *Twilight* saga.

So what accounts for Mormonism's transformation from America's pariah religion to the dead-center of the mainstream? Here's a look at surprising facts about Mormons, some of which might account for the church's meteoric rise over the past century.



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Mormonism is one of the fastest-growing religions in the U.S.

With 6 million members, Mormonism is now the fourth-largest religion in the United States, according to the [most recent data](#) from the Pew Research Center. The church claims to add about 1 million members every three years.

More than a quarter of American Mormons - including Fox News host Glenn Beck — converted to the faith.

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Membership in the Mormon church has more than doubled since the 1980s.

There are now more than 14 million Mormons worldwide, more than half of which live outside the U.S., according to [2010 church statistics](#).

A key reason for the Mormon explosion is the church's commitment to proselytization, primarily through missionaries. Every young Mormon man is expected to serve a two-year mission overseas, and many of them describe it as "the [best two years of my life](#)." Currently, there are more than 50,000 Mormon missionaries serving the church across the globe.

As a consequence of their missionary work, most Mormons are fluent in a foreign language. Jon Huntsman, for example, is fluent in Chinese and Mitt Romney speaks French.

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The church's assets are thought to be worth more than \$30 billion.

The main source of the church's wealth is [tithing](#) — Mormons are required to give one-tenth of their annual income to the church in order to be allowed to pray in the Temple. The church reportedly receives more than \$5 billion in tithes every year.

The church also has substantial real estate and for-profit business investments, managed by [Deseret Management Corp.](#) The company is one of the largest owners of farm and ranch land in the U.S. It owns the country's largest nut producer, AgReserves, Inc., the 14th largest radio chain, Bonneville International Corp., and a life insurance company.

Economic entrepreneurialism is actually part of Mormon doctrine — 88 of the 112 revelations received by church founder Joseph Smith deal with fiscal matters.



The Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City, Utah.

hannerorla via Flickr

In 2010 Goldman Sachs hired 31 grads from Brigham Young University — the same number hired from Wharton.

The church's entrepreneurial spirit has fostered some powerful Mormon businessmen, including presidential hopefuls Mitt Romney and Jon Huntsman, Jr., (whose father invented McDonald's clamshell Big Mac containers). Other famous Mormon executives include Jet Blue founder David Neeleman, Credit Suisse CEO Eric Varvel, and former Citigroup CFO Gary Crittenden.

Mormons hold a [disproportionate number of top jobs](#) at several major companies, including Marriott, American Express, Dell, Lufthansa, Fisher-Price, and Deloitte.

The clean-cut optimism, honesty and family values of the Latter-day Saints also make them ideal politicians. In addition to Romney and Huntsman, 15 U.S. senators and congressional representatives are Mormons, including Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a rare Mormon Democrat.



Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid is a Mormon.

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The CIA and the FBI have Mormon recruitment programs.

The apparent incorruptibility of Mormons' moral righteousness make them ideal candidates for the nation's law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Mormons are disproportionately represented in the CIA. A recruiter told the Salt Lake Tribune that returned Mormon missionaries are valued for their foreign language skills, abstinence from drugs and alcohol, and respect for authority.



Mormon missionaries in Barcelona.

Greg Robbins via Flickr

Modern-day Mormon prophets relay God's messages to the faithful.

The doctrine of "[continuous revelation](#)" is a central tenant of Mormonism. Mormons believe that Jesus, under the direction of God (or Heavenly Father), leads the church by revealing his will to the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who is considered a modern-day prophet and seer.

Mormons regard the sayings of the modern prophets as additional scripture, and are open to the possibility that God could reveal more scripture in the future. So unlike most Christian denominations, Mormonism has an open religious canon - the church's doctrine always has the potential to change.

Perhaps the most famous modern-day prophecy is the 1978 revelation that all males - including black men - could hold the Mormon priesthood.



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The Twilight saga is actually about the Mormon belief in eternal marriage.

The *Twilight* series, by Mormon author Stephanie Meyers, is an allegory for the Mormon concept of "celestial marriage" - the belief that a couple that is "sealed" in a Mormon temple will stay bound together forever in the afterlife.

Edward and Bella's bond is sealed when Edward bites Bella. As with a Mormon marriage, there's no turning back for Bella, who is transformed into a vampire for eternity.

Clearly, the idea has some appeal. The series has sold over 116 million copies worldwide and is available in 38 languages. The film franchise has grossed more than \$1.8 billion so far.

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The Mormon church thinks polygamy might be okay in the afterlife.

Although the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the official Mormon church) abolished the practice in 1890, it still believes that the divine principle of plural marriage may apply in heaven. In the case of death or divorce, Mormon men can be sealed to another wife and all of their celestial marriages will be honored in eternity.

The LDS Church has tried to distance itself from the 40,000 fundamentalist Mormons who still practice polygamy in the U.S. The church has spoken out against TV shows like HBO's *Big Love* and TLC's *Sister Wives*, which it says exploit outdated stereotypes about the faith.

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Courtesy of HBO

Mormons have special underwear.

Mormons wear special undergarments called a "temple garment" to remind them of their covenant with the Mormon temple. It is also designed to give "protection against temptation and evil."

Many Mormons believe the underwear provides spiritual protection.

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Mormons believe that when Jesus returns, he's coming to the U.S.

Despite its growing global reach, Mormonism is, at its core, a wholly American religion.

Mormons believe that Jesus Christ visited the American continent shortly after his resurrection to teach early indigenous peoples who were actually members of some of the Lost Tribes of Israel. After all the other Christian churches fell into apostasy, God sent the Angel Moroni to reveal new scripture to Joseph Smith, a simple man living in Palmyra, NY.

One of the revelations that God gave Joseph Smith was that Jesus will personally return to reign over a paradisaical Kingdom on earth. His headquarters will be at the Mormon temple in Jackson County, Missouri.

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A Mormon Temple under construction in Missouri.

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100,000 people attend the church's reenactment of The Book of Mormon every year.

Every July Mormons converge on Palmyra, NY for the Hill Cumorah Pageant, an outdoor show based on the Book of Mormon. The performance has a cast of more than 650 people and takes place on a 10-level stage. Many Mormon converts say the pageant was a major influence for their conversions.

The event coincides with Pioneer Day, an official Utah state holiday that celebrates the Mormons arrival in the Salt Lake Valley.



The Mormon Hill Cumorah pageant.

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But can a Mormon be elected president?

[Here's eight things you didn't know about Jon Huntsman >](#)



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