**HM4518 - Shannon Mcmillan**

**The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**

The Cheltenham meetinghouse was built in the 1960s by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), mainly from the American and Canadian stakes. This meetinghouse is part of the Cheltenham Stake, which has consisted of more than twelve congregations since 1850 and was founded on the 21st of March 1982. With the LDS Church having over ‘150 meetinghouses’[[1]](#footnote-1) worldwide these buildings are ‘the locus of a network of global and diasporic interconnections’ with all the UK meetinghouses simultaneously performing Sunday sacrament at 10am.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Cheltenham LDS Church has been well established among the Latter-day Saint community as Brigham Young; the second leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints preached at the Chapel in 1840.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Gadfield Elm Chapel was built in 1836 by the United Brethren and was received by President Gordon B. Hinckley on behalf of the Church in May 2004 and is the oldest Latter-day Saint Chapel and the last surviving memorial to the United Brethren. Gadfield Elm is ‘like [a] palimpsest on which the scrambled game of identity and relations in ceaselessly rewritten’[[4]](#footnote-4) from its ownership by the Church of the United Brethren, a group of Orthodox Protestants in Gloucestershire, who converted to the Church of Latter-day Saints in the 1800s.[[5]](#footnote-5) This transferal of space from these different Christian traditions support Knott’s argument that space is not only physical, with the theory of ‘dimensions of space’ as this chapel has ‘been produced, and then periodically redesigned and reproduced in stone and bricks’.[[6]](#footnote-6) With this change of traditions, spiritual space has been transferred to the LDS tradition, enforcing the argument that ‘the body as the source and resource for space’, with religion transcending the physical with the people and their conversion effects aspects of the building itself.[[7]](#footnote-7) Religious space ‘without the body… would be merely a mutual, absolute block or else a tangled skein of pure relations built up from pure positions.’ as space is physical, social, and mental.[[8]](#footnote-8) The importance of the body in religious space is reflected in Kant’s implicit series of terms of ‘Position - Place - Body - Region - Space’[[9]](#footnote-9) with the body being used to describe a representation of the location of the body in a place and relating to the region and space.

The Cheltenham meetinghouse provides religious services such as a weekly Sunday sacrament as ‘Christianity has always valued collective acts of worship’ that are simultaneous across the country.[[10]](#footnote-10) Cheltenham’s meetinghouse provides baby blessings, baptisms, a Sunday school, marriage ceremonies by an ordained Bishop, with Christmas and Easter celebrations and access to a genealogy centre along with ancestor baptisms. This ancestor remembrance and honouring links the meetinghouse to the afterlife and this ‘spatial focus follows bodies through the dynamism of life to dying and death [and]… continuing of spirit’.[[11]](#footnote-11) This also creates a social space that ‘incorporates social actions… both [on the] individual and collective who are born and who die’[[12]](#footnote-12), opening up the Church’s experience from the physical into the spiritual and the afterlife, allowing the meetinghouse to expand into the ‘physical, mental and social nature of space.’[[13]](#footnote-13) The Sunday school teaches their children about their religion, and its beliefs and practices with scripture in effort to maintain spiritual life and their religion in new generations. Along with non-religious services such as study classes for fourteen to eighteen-year-olds with thirteen classrooms, and family nights for the congregation. Along with services that help the wider community both locally and globally with blood drives, food bank and clothing collections.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The LDS Church services extend from the local community into missionary work which comprises of two years volunteering helping international congregations and their communities in religious and non-religious issues. This missionary and charity work extended into the covid-19 pandemic with the LDS Church being involved with ‘over 110 COVID-19 relief projects in 57 countries.’[[15]](#footnote-15) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints community maintained spiritual life during the covid-19 pandemic with support from their President and Prophet, Russel M. Nelson. During the pandemic and closure of the meetinghouses and chapels, Sunday sacrament transcended the physical space of the religious buildings and continued the elements of worship within the home every Sunday. These sacraments may have been performed in meetinghouses or chapels across the country in a live broadcast or the priests or bishops recording services, which would create simultaneity with those at home and those in the meetinghouses, alongside the collective worship with Sunday sacrament being performed simultaneously across the country by the congregations in the UK.

These ‘Latter-day Saint Charities… have partnerships, whether it’s a pandemic or not,’ which extend across the global Christian community.[[16]](#footnote-16) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have worked ‘in partnership with the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA),’ during the covid 19 pandemic, providing food and protective equipment.[[17]](#footnote-17)  The LDS Church and Catholic Church have worked together to help aid those in need, such as providing supplies with Christian charities, and ‘educating the public concerning political issues of a moral nature,’ through the pandemic.[[18]](#footnote-18) President and Prophet Russel M. Nelson formally met with Pope Francis II in 2019 as the first leader of the Latter-day Saints Church to do so, in attempt of ‘the building [of] bridges of friendship instead of building walls of segregation’, continuing the historic relationship and linking with the contemporary with the relationship between the Christian Churches and the Church of Latter-day Saints members and missionaries preaching in other houses of worship in attempt to convert Christian congregations.[[19]](#footnote-19) During Nelson’s visit of the Pope, Elder Dini Ciacci commented that these ‘religious leaders “share brotherhood”. That feeling of brotherhood, love and respect is an example to all who interact with those of other faiths.’[[20]](#footnote-20) The Latter-day Saint ‘Church has worked “side by side” with Catholic Relief Service in 43 countries.’[[21]](#footnote-21) While the relationship between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ and national Christian communities has created friction which has led to division about beliefs and on social issues such as LGBTQ+ rights.[[22]](#footnote-22)

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Researching for this project I started with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Gadfield Elm Chapel websites and social media for the base research and read the Latter-day Saints Church’s articles to further my project with their involvement in the covid 19 pandemic. I also reread and rewatched the Contemporary Religious Landscapes lecture on Mormonism with the Cheltenham Chapel and Congregation, for the base knowledge of ceremonies performed at the Cheltenham meetinghouse. The LDS Church website allowed me to see the LDS community as a whole and gain insight into their beliefs and practices which helped in drawing connections between their Church and other denominations of Christianity such as Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism. Then I expanded my research to academic writing by Kim Knott on the dimensions of space and used other scholar’s and theorists’ arguments on religion and religious space to support my arguments, such as Henri Lefebvre’s ‘The Production of Space’ and Edward S. Casey’s ‘The Fate of Place’ referenced in Knott’s work to expand the academic theory of religious space in the physical, social, and mental space within my project.

During my research I found limited resources on the relationships between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. I overcame this by focusing on the history of the Latter-day Saints Church along with the Gadfield Elm Chapel, and their involvement in their local and global communities with missionary work, helping vernacular congregations and their surrounding communities with both religious and non-religious problems and concerns. If there were more resources on the interrelationships of Christianity, I could have expanded on the connections of historical and contemporary Latter-day Saints congregations and organisation with other Christian denominations and how these relationships have developed over time and if there was any friction with the wider Christian community. This would have modernised my project in the more secular society and allowed more perspective into the relationship the Latter-day Saints Church has with the physical, social, and cyber space.

If I were to do a similar project in the future, I would change my approach to be more concise and focused on a specific aspect of a religion or continue research on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Perhaps focus on a specific academic theory and analyse their arguments in relation to a religious tradition or religious building, focusing on the more contemporary aspects of the LDS Church. Also research the Church’s leadership and how Russel M. Nelson has shaped the Latter-day Saints Church compared to his predecessors and adapted the religion alongside the increase of secularisation and contemporary societal norms that may contradict the Book of Mormon and its teachings.

During this research process I developed and enhanced my skills in researching and finding relevant quotes from scholars, articles, and websites. This process has allowed me to collect information and organise my thoughts coherently alongside the use of academic theory and resources about a specific religion and tradition.

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6. Knott, p.158. 2009 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid, p.157 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Edward S. Casey. The Fate of Place: A philosophical history. Centennial Books, pp.210, 1998 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid, pp.209 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Steve Bruce. Christianity in Britain, R.I.P., Sociology of Religion, Vol. 62, Issue 2, pp.201 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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