

Maclane Heward

“Our First Mission’: Early Mormon Creation, Adoption and Adaption of Evangelistic Structures”

Even before its official organization in 1830, evangelism was a significant aspect of Mormonism. In its nascent phase, systematic evangelism and organizational structure lagged behind the movement’s growth. As the faith transformed from a movement following a charismatic leader to one of significant institutional viability, the role of evangelism, its methodologies and institutional structures, morphed. One of the key advancements in Mormons institutional development of evangelism was the creation of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, still a foundational structure in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Created in February 1835, this Quorum commenced its first mission on May 4 of the same year. They departing the Mormon settlement of Kirtland Ohio and headed eastward, holding conferences in various locations as they preached in groups of two traveling towards the eastern seaboard.

This presentation will use the creation of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and their subsequent mission to discuss a number of topics. First, it will briefly discuss Mormonism’s distinct ideological concept of conversion as compared with the contemporary of reinvigoration of fellow Christians through revivalism. It will offer perspectives on the process of Mormonism’s adoption and its adaption of religious structures, primarily the structure of the Methodist revivalists, and how that process facilitated growth. It will also discuss the diverse reactions to these evangelical changes among both the hierarchal leadership and its membership.