

## What the Presiding Bishopric has to say about the finances of the Church and the faith of its members



Attendees leave the Sunday afternoon session of the 189th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City on Sunday, Oct. 6, 2019. **Credit: Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News**

[By Sarah Jane Weaver](#)

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SALT LAKE CITY — The financial prosperity of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a reflection of the faith of its members, said [Presiding Bishop Gérald Caussé](#) during a rare interview Thursday about Church finances and reserves.

“If you look at the Church as a financial institution, you will never understand it,” he said. “You have to look at it as an organization of consecrated followers of Jesus Christ with a mission.”

Together with his counselors, [Bishop Dean M. Davies](#) and [Bishop W. Christopher Waddell](#), Bishop Caussé sat down in a joint interview with the Church News and the Deseret News to discuss the “accelerating and expanding” work of the Church of Jesus Christ, the organization’s vast holdings and the tithes and offerings donated by members. They said the funds contributed by members “belong to the Lord,” and detailed how and where they are spent, as well as how the Church’s investment process is overseen. Care for funds is a sacred, serious role, Bishop Caussé said.

“It’s no surprise we are talking about billions of dollars,” said Bishop Caussé, speaking of the Church’s holdings and its 16 million members living in 190 countries. “Nobody should be surprised, given the number of members.”



Presiding Bishop Gérald Caussé speaks at the dedication of the Gilbert Arizona Bishops' Storehouse on Friday, Oct. 18. **Credit: Robin Finlinson, Intellectual Reserve, Inc.**

The [Church's size and large budget](#) also provide the “opportunity to expand the reach of all the good that the Church can do around the world,” he said.

“It is a Church. It is not a financial institution.”

### **Church priorities**

The education of Latter-day Saints and the Church's four divinely appointed responsibilities — helping members live the gospel of Jesus Christ, gathering Israel through missionary work, caring for the poor and needy, and enabling the salvation of the dead by building temples — account for the majority of Church expenditures and provides the spiritual backing for decision-making, said Bishop Caussé.

### **[Deseret News: Church finances — Presiding Bishopric offers unique look inside financial operations of growing faith](#)**

The [Church has doubled its humanitarian donations](#) over the past five years, spending almost \$1 billion annually to care for the poor and the needy. The costs associated with running the Church are also increasing. The organization provides support for 30,000 congregations, educates 850,000 students in seminary and institute, and is engaged in aggressive temple construction — maintaining 167 temples with another 50 announced or under construction. And the cumulative expenditures of the Church's universities is about \$1.5 billion per year, said Bishop Caussé.



The Rio de Janeiro Brazil Temple. *Credit: Intellectual Reserve, Inc.*

Bishop Caussé said the needs of the Church — including construction of meetinghouses; translation of materials; upkeep of missionary training centers, mission homes and area offices; maintenance of one of the world’s largest family history databases; and care for visitors’ centers and historical sites, to name just a few — are constantly increasing, especially as it expands into emerging countries with young populations. Tithing in those countries cannot cover expenditures, he explained, and must be supplemented with funds from other areas of the world.

Bishop Davies said it is impossible to separate the Church’s practices and the counsel it gives members, “which is to live within the means and to set aside a reserve for times of need.”

Just as the biblical prophet Joseph saved for seven years of famine during seven years of prosperity, “there will come a time when these resources, reserves, will be necessary,” said Bishop Waddell.

### **Long-term outlook**

Care for the Church's finances is accomplished with "the best professional expertise possible" and also with the spirit of revelation, said Bishop Caussé. The Church is conservative and prudent and has a long-term outlook.

Church policy dictates that Church leaders establish an annual budget based on expected revenues, while setting aside funds for the future.

Following the "longest period of prosperity in the United States," the Church's reserves invested by Ensign Peak Advisors, the Church's investment management arm, have grown substantially during the past decades.



The Salt Lake Temple photographed in Salt Lake City on Wednesday, Dec. 4, 2019. *Credit: Kristin Murphy, Deseret News*

Further, Bishop Waddell said the Church diversifies and does not invest all its holdings in financial assets. In addition to the reserves, the organization has invested in real property — commercial real estate, residential real estate and in agriculture.

"Our belief is that at some point the reserves are going to be used, they are going to be needed," Bishop Waddell said. "We don't know exactly when or in what form, but they're going to be needed to further the work of the Church."

Bishop Waddell said there will also be future downturns.

The Church's financial holdings and reserves are being carefully watched over, protected and wisely handled, he said. In times of recession, "we won't have to stop missionary work, we won't have to stop maintaining buildings and building temples, we won't have to stop humanitarian and welfare work, we won't have to stop education."

### **Tithes and offerings**

Bishop Davies said [the paying of tithes](#) is a covenant or a spiritual commitment which blesses both the giver and receiver. The Lord has promised He will "prosper his children as they keep the commandments."

"It is a great promise that is often repeated in the Book of Mormon, but it is very valid and current in our world," he said, noting that the blessings that come are spiritual first but also have temporal components.

Bishop Caussé said it always touches his heart when he learns of people living in poor conditions that are very faithful in [paying their tithing and fast offerings](#), expecting blessings to follow. When people cannot afford to pay tithing and buy food, they are counseled to pay tithing and let the Church help them with food.



A campus sign at the entrance of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. *Credit: Nate Edwards, BYU*

There is an assumption by some that the Church is taking money from the poor so it can amass money, said Bishop Waddell. “It’s anything but,” he added. “They pay their tithing because it is a commandment, and they are encouraged to. If they only have enough money to pay tithing or eat, pay your tithing and we’ll help with food, because the blessings that are associated with the payment of tithing will then be theirs. And they won’t go hungry because we have the ability to assist them now.”

“I think every member of the Church pays tithing out of faith, not considering whether the money will be used now or tomorrow,” said Bishop Causse.

Fast offerings — where members forgo two meals a month and donate the cost of those meals to help the poor and needy — are also a matter of faith.

Bishop Davies said the number of those who contribute fast offerings is very close to the same number of those who pay tithing. “So there is a parallel,” said Bishop Davies.

### **Mission of the Church**

Bishop Caussé said [caring for those in need](#) across the globe is at the heart of the mission of the Church. It is not “an appendage to the mission,” but instead is intermingled in everything the Church does. “We are all sons and daughters of God upon the earth, and we are committed to take care of one another,” he said. “And this is one of the ways that, as disciples of Lord Jesus Christ, we care for those in need.” In addition to responding to disasters across the globe, Church humanitarian funds have been used to provide food programs, vision care, maternal and newborn care, clean water and sanitation, immunizations, wheelchairs, and help for refugees.



Bao Dinh Tran is helped by his wife Quyen Thi Mai into his wheelchair given to him by Latter-day Saints Charities in Hanoi, Vietnam on Saturday, Nov. 16, 2019. **Credit: Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret News**

However, reaching out and helping those in need is “a very complex endeavor,” he said. The Church can’t just send out cash and checks to people, he said. “It has to be done in an organized way, and with follow up, with training, a lot of expertise and good partners. Otherwise, you just don’t get any results.”

Bishop Davies said the Church is careful to select humanitarian projects and partners that will make the best use of the Church’s funds. “We are very careful with the widow’s mite,” referring to the biblical parable by the Savior.

“We recognize that this comes from the faith of Church members and we want to make certain that they have the trust and confidence that their donations are being managed in a careful and thoughtful and very safe way for them and for the Church,” said Bishop Davies.

Leaders often ask themselves “what else can we do, where else can we go, who else can we work with,” said Bishop Waddell.

Every time the Church reaches out, the objective is to bless both the giver and the receiver, added Bishop Caussé. So in addition to selecting good humanitarian projects, Church leaders are always mindful of providing service opportunities for Church members. “It’s not just a matter of money,” he said. It’s also done as members “devote time and resources and efforts to help others.”



Sister Sharon Eubank, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, gives spouses of U.S. governors a tour of the facilities and talks about clothing donation at the Latter-day Saint Humanitarian Center in Salt Lake City on Thursday, July 25, 2019. **Credit: Kristin Murphy, Deseret News**

A leader of the Church in Samoa recently detailed how a Church project to provide medical equipment and physicians “has changed the health of thousands of people” on the island where he lives, said Bishop Waddell. “It wasn’t the money that was provided, it was the people” that provided the services and made all the difference, he said.

As to the question, is the Church doing enough, Bishop Causse said, “We hope we can do more and more in the future, and as the Church grows, there will be more opportunities for doing good.”

### **Church investments**

Because of the sacred nature of Latter-day Saint funds, the management of Church finances occurs at the highest levels of Church leadership.

The investments of the Church, for example, are overseen by two committees, said Bishop Caussé. The Investment Policy Committee, chaired by [President Russell M. Nelson](#), is composed of the First

Presidency, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and members of the Presiding Bishopric. The second committee is the Investment Executive Committee. It meets monthly and includes the Presiding Bishopric and managing directors over Church investments. This Committee reviews and prepares recommendations to be taken to the Investment Policy Committee.

Bishop Caussé said Church financial policy is clear: “We will not expend more than the expected revenues. The budget is based on that principle.”

Funds donated to the Church belong to the Lord, he said. “We believe that there needs to be a lot of care in the handling of the finances of the Church.”