

Mormons, Jews reach pact on baptisms for the dead

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Jewish and Mormon officials have announced that church policies preventing the posthumous baptizing of Holocaust victims have reduced tensions between them.

Leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints said they now require church members to have a family relationship with the people they baptize by proxy. Mormons must also agree not to include Holocaust victims unless they are directly related to them, thereby preventing the mass submissions of such names that had occurred in the past.

The announcement September 1 by the church and the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants said the new policies, which have been in the works for more than two years, will enhance cooperation between Jews and Mormons.

The church teaches that Mormons can be baptized on behalf of their dead ancestors, who then choose whether to accept the baptism in the afterlife.

"Respect for the Jewish identity of Holocaust victims is naturally a highly sensitive matter, and we are glad to see new movement in resolving the problems of the past," said B'nai B'rith International president Dennis W. Glick. But some Jewish leaders, including Jewish genealogist Gary Mokotoff, continue to question whether the church will be able to prevent Holocaust victims from being included in proxy baptisms. "It's on the books, but no one enforces it," he told the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

Church spokesperson Michael Otterson said there could still be glitches, but the church and Jewish groups are ready to move on. "We've resolved the issues to our mutual satisfaction," he said. "We all know that no system is ever going to be foolproof." —RNS