

How to Start and Sustain LDS Ancestral Family Organizations

LDSAFA (ldsafa.org), April 2017

What is an Ancestral Family Organization?

An Ancestral Family Organization (AFO) is larger than a parent or grandparent family and includes the descendants of a common ancestral couple. Today dozens of AFO's exist for the descendants of LDS pioneers.

Why Have an Ancestral Family Organization?

Ancestral Family Organizations (AFOs) are often able to accomplish much more than individual families or grandparent family associations. Because of their extensive membership and databases, AFOs are often able to locate and obtain genealogical and historical information much faster and cheaper than individual families or grandparent associations. Also, because of their broad membership and extensive number of contributors, AFOs can usually afford and support extensive research by experienced or professional genealogists much easier and for longer durations than smaller family associations.

What are the Purposes of Ancestral Family Organizations?

In 1978, President Ezra Taft Benson, then President of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, stated the following: "Ancestral family organizations are comprised of descendants of a common ancestral couple. The major purpose for organizing or perpetuating an ancestral family organization is to coordinate genealogical activity on common ancestral lines. When ancestral family organizations deviate from this major objective and seek primarily to provide social, cultural, or other types of activities, they take over the legitimate domain of the immediate and grandparent organizations. ...Another legitimate function of the ancestral organization is to provide resource material from which the immediate and grandparent family organizations can draw to complete family histories—especially on their first four generations. Thus the ancestral organizations may accumulate, properly file, catalog, and preserve histories, photographs, letters, manuscripts, diaries, journals, and published books." (*Ensign*, November 1978)

How do you Start Ancestral Family Organizations?

Most LDS Ancestral Family Organizations (AFOs) operate with family officers, board of directors, and/or board of trustees. The first step to organizing an AFO is to find and join with other family members who support the idea of creating and maintaining an AFO, and then select and support family officers who agree to actively carry out the purposes and functions of the organization.

In 1972, Dean W. Belnap stated the following: "Begin by personally inviting interested relatives to a family meeting. This would allow family heads to discuss family organization programs and literature offered by the Church. A calendar of reunions could be drawn up. Officers could be selected: [such as a president and vice-president;] a treasurer to collect dues, record expenditures, and make a periodic financial report to the family; a secretary to gather family news and publish a monthly or semiannual newsletter. ...A genealogy chairman

could be selected to assess the family genealogical resources and act as a coordinator to help family members build their individual genealogical records. Though the organization may start small, if its founders are efficient and energetic, the natural tendency for families to unite will soon take its course. More and more relatives will become active in the organization as word gets around. And soon the organization will be running full steam.” (*Ensign*, August 1972)

Today dozens of LDS Ancestral Family Organizations in the United States are registered with State governments and/or the IRS as religiously-based non-profit corporations--because their genealogical and historical efforts are directly linked to the performance of LDS temple work. These organizations follow specific governing criteria and have formal “Articles of Incorporation” and “By Laws”--examples of which can be viewed under the “Resources” section of the LDSAFA website (*ldsafa.org*).

How do you Sustain Ancestral Family Organizations?

In 1978, President Ezra Taft Benson, then President of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, stated the following: “The major purpose for organizing or perpetuating an ancestral family organization is to coordinate genealogical activity on common ancestral lines. ...The immediate and grandparent family organizations should then be assigned the responsibility of reunions and soliciting of funds. ...Again, I emphasize that every family in the Church should belong to an immediate and, insofar as possible, a grandparent family organization. Ancestral organizations exist only for the coordination of genealogical activity, which includes family histories. Once this function has been accomplished the ancestral family organization might well be dissolved, or at least reduced in importance, in favor of the immediate and grandparent organizations.” (*Ensign*, November 1978) Unfortunately, President Benson’s comment—that “Once [the coordination of genealogical activity and family histories are finished] ancestral family organization[s] might well be dissolved, or at least reduced in importance...”—was taken to the extreme by some individuals who suggested that ancestral family organizations were no longer important or necessary.

In 1981, the LDS Church published the following announcement: “All members are encouraged to expand their genealogical research beyond four generations. To avoid duplication, it would be helpful if records were submitted through family organizations. A family organization might consist of a couple and their children. It may be expanded to include grandchildren. Ancestral family organizations may also be developed from descendants of any common ancestral couple. They can coordinate genealogical activity on common ancestral lines and provide resource material from which families can draw to complete family histories.” (*Ensign*, November 1981)

Today most LDS Ancestral Family Organizations (AFOs) focus on coordinating, conducting and providing genealogical and historical information on their respective family lineages; and most AFO reunions concentrate on obtaining, presenting and supplying such information to family members and relatives. Interestingly, one AFO recently stated: “We now conduct extensive research on the genealogies and histories of our families and their ancestors and descendants--which we periodically upload into *FamilySearch Tree*, hold international reunions every five years, sponsor a DNA genealogy project, produce genealogical and historical publications and videos, identify military memorials, erect historical monuments, preserve family documents, and encourage young people to get involved in family history work.” (Submission to *LDSAFA*, March 2017)