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A Large-Scale Annotated Dataset of Contemporary Latter-day Saint Worship Services in the United States

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The transition to hybrid worship beginning with the COVID-19 pandemic has provided scholars with an opportunity to analyze religious language at a much larger scale than previously possible. This article introduces a novel dataset of weekly worship services from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) that was created to study local religious dynamics within a highly centralized institutional context. We detail the collection of transcripts via the YouTube API (2022–2025) and the development of a multi-stage annotation pipeline that incorporates Large Language Models (LLMs) to identify individual speakers and available attributes such as age and gender. Validation against human coding confirms accuracy exceeding 96 percent across key variables. Furthermore, demographic analysis demonstrates that the sample covers counties containing 58 percent of the U.S. LDS population, exhibiting political and cultural representativeness with only moderate urban-infrastructural bias. By providing a structured, verifiable corpus of contemporary vernacular theology, this dataset offers scholars a new resource for understanding weekly religious practice in the United States from roughly 2022–2025.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only transformed religious practice by moving many worship services online, it also created new opportunities to study the language of worship at scale by making data collection on weekly services far more accessible for research (Pew Research Center 2019; Quinn 2021). While this shift online has become a more permanent feature of communal worship for some congregations (e.g., Greenhalgh and Tanner 2026), others have adopted a hybrid model that provides online broadcasts of in-person gatherings for those unable to physically participate. This shift has allowed researchers to document worship language during the height of the pandemic and track its evolution in the years since. Scholars are now using this data to measure patterns in religious discourse across denominational contexts (Billet et al. 2024).

This paper contributes to the scholarship on worship language by introducing a dataset focused on a single tradition: the Church of Jesus Christ of

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Latter-day Saints (hereafter LDS Church). Previous research has shown how sermons, prayers, and hymns across various Christian denominations serve as both a mirror and a molder of faith communities. These texts not only transmit theological content but also reflect and shape how congregants navigate their roles in society, culture, and politics (Harding 1987; Keane 1997). While the LDS Church represents but a small part of the broader landscape of American religion, it has long served as a productive case study for scholars of religion exploring broad sociological questions regarding authority, pluralism, sexuality, and globalization (Shipps 1985; Mauss 1994; Phillips 2005; Campbell, Green, and Monson 2014). For example, while existing research has documented notable regional variation in worship language (Klebig et al. 2021; Guhin et al. 2023), the LDS model offers a natural experiment for assessing the extent to which institutional design interacts with cultural and political influences. If decentralized religious traditions exhibit wide variation in speaker demographics and rhetorical style, the LDS case allows us to probe how local community dynamics emerge within a highly correlated worship system.

Furthermore, the dataset enables a move beyond "official" LDS discourse as propagated through the biannual General Conference to examine local or vernacular worship practices. There is a growing body of scholarship studying the evolution of General Conference talks over time. Such work has paid attention to institutional rhetoric around themes such as gathering (Shepherd and Shepherd 2016), female authority (Wells 2022), evolving invocations of the name of the Lord (Stapley 2021; Madsen and Corey 2023), and changing moral rhetoric (Madsen and Reynolds 2026). To be clear, sacrament meetings still remain a fairly controlled and performative space, distinct from the more "heterodox" rhetoric we might find in the hallways or in online Mormon spaces (e.g., Avance 2025; Greenhalgh and Chapman 2023; Brooks 2019; Ross and Finnigan 2014). However, our dataset provides one window into the interaction between the central and the local, and how central ideas are refracted, reiterated, or negotiated at the local level. Moreover, it has the potential to provide an alternative lens to previous research that has sought to understand how broader social and cultural contexts impact religious practice in the LDS tradition (e.g., Phillips 2001; Riess 2019).

Context for Online Streaming

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the LDS Church to reconsider its long-standing prohibition of recording and streaming sacrament services,

moving from emergency adoption to a gradual codification of the practice as deemed appropriate by local leaders. Between 2010 and 2019, church handbooks explicitly banned the broadcasting of chapel meetings via the internet, particularly for sacred ordinances and rituals such as administering the sacrament (LDS 2010, 193). This stance remained firm until the pandemic's onset in early 2020 necessitated the suspension of public gatherings (LDS 2020b). Following months of local experimentation, church leadership issued official guidelines in September 2020, which formally reversed the ban and authorized bishops to hold virtual or hybrid broadcasts (LDS 2020a). These emergency measures were eventually formalized in the *General Handbook* in March 2021. While the church continued to encourage in-person attendance when possible, it officially recognized the value of digital access for those unable to attend due to travel limitations, health challenges, being essential workers or immunocompromised, and even those needing sign-language interpretation (LDS 2021, 259–260). Notably, the early variability in adoption modes appears to have shaped downstream practices at the local level; even after official policies were solidified, many congregations continued earlier ad hoc procedures, such as maintaining public online archives of past services.

As the church transitioned to online meetings, it consistently promoted policies that encouraged accessibility while also preserving the privacy and sanctity of its worship services. The choice of platform was determined by the type of meeting. For noninteractive events such as weekly sacrament meetings, guidelines suggested streaming through the church-owned Meetinghouse Webcast or, as alternatives, the more familiar Facebook Live and YouTube Live. Zoom and Google Meet were recommended for interactive settings such as quorum meetings or classes (Office of the Presiding Bishopric 2020). Due to the church's concerns over privacy, it asked that online streams on platforms such as YouTube would be listed as "unpublished." Over time, it stressed that all stream recordings were to be deleted or removed within one day of the event. Despite this recommendation, there were plenty of examples where local or regional congregations maintained large backlogs of their streaming services publicly available online even as late as 2025. Policies consistently mandated that the stream be paused during some rituals such as the administration of the sacrament, enforcing a boundary between the public broadcast of sermons and the private, sacred nature of specific ordinances as emphasized in pre-pandemic policies. In these cases, the feed was to be paused or the ordinance moved to the end of the meeting (LDS 2021, 259–260).

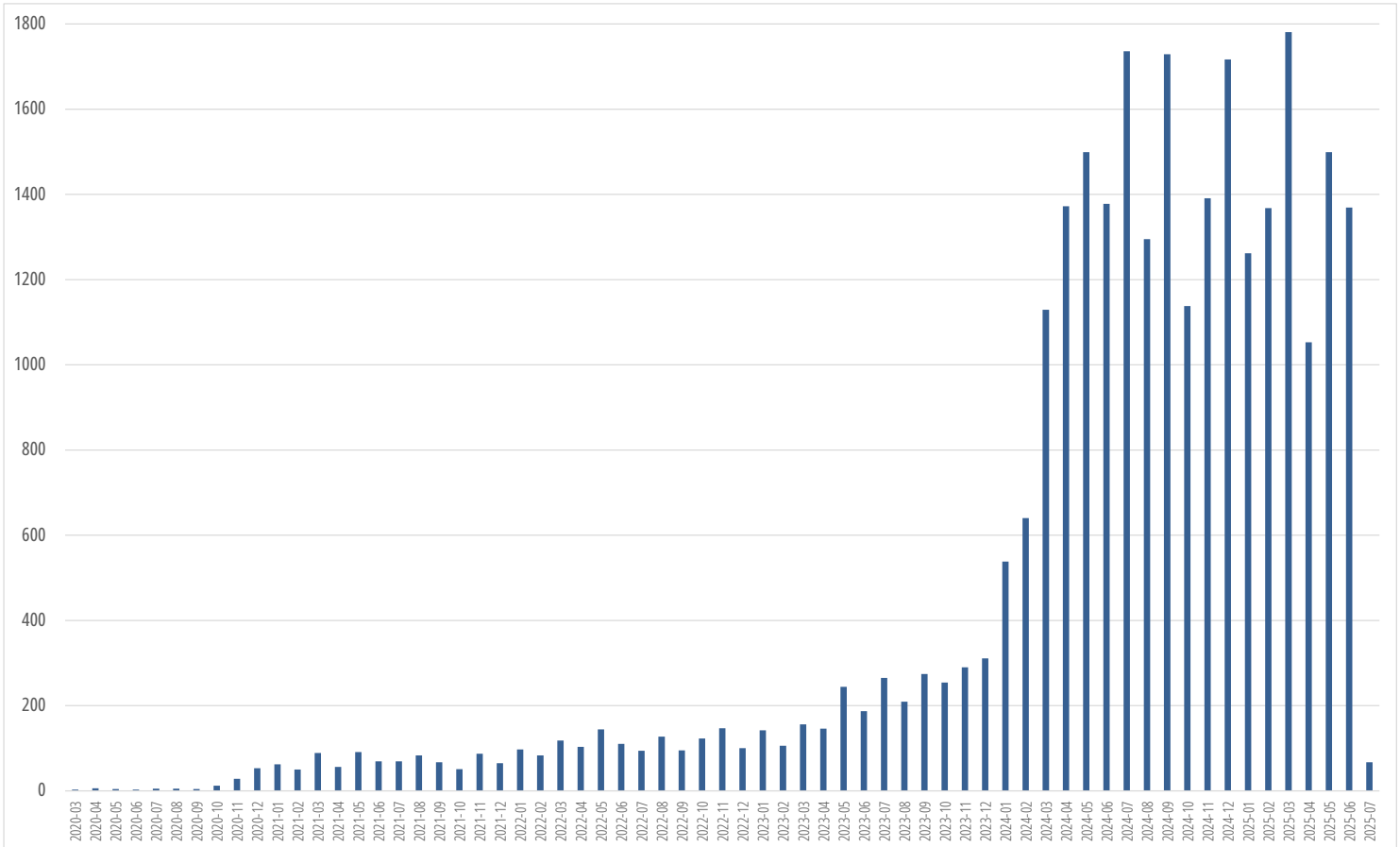
As the pandemic crisis eased, the church's policies shifted from emergency adoption to more restricted use. By early 2021, the official handbook included specific language stating that "streams and virtual meetings are not meant for the convenience of those who could reasonably attend in person" (LDS 2021, 260). Policy shifted from one of public safety to specific accommodations. The decision to continue streaming—along with which platform to stream on—became a local determination by the bishop or stake president. Although many units have returned to exclusively in-person worship, a significant subset of wards continue to stream services for vulnerable or homebound members, a practice that remains prevalent as of this writing in early 2026.

Data Collection and Coverage

Recognizing the notable number of congregations that maintained a digital presence in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, we began identifying and cataloging LDS units with a YouTube presence in late 2022. Using this list as a foundation, we developed an automatic pipeline to systematically capture newly uploaded worship services via the YouTube API on a weekly basis. We concluded data collection in mid-2025 after changes to YouTube's transcript delivery protocols disrupted our extraction pipeline. While these technical issues were later resolved, this disruption served as a practical cutoff for the current dataset. While congregations utilized a variety of streaming platforms, YouTube offered the most viable infrastructure for us to capture both audiovisual content and associated transcripts in accordance with IRB protocols for social media research. Consequently, the resulting dataset does not constitute a random sample; rather, it represents a specific subset of congregations that elected to utilize YouTube and maintained their digital broadcast beyond the initial emergency phase of the pandemic.

The initial phase of data collection focused on identifying relevant channels by searching YouTube for terms such as "LDS Ward," "Sacrament Meeting," and "Stake Conference." We initially included keywords to capture services in languages other than English, but our queries returned minimal results, leading us to focus primarily on English-language worship services. This process yielded around 600 unique YouTube channels representing different wards and stakes. Using the LDS Church's online Meetinghouse Locator tool (https://maps.churchofjesuschrist.org/), we were able to gather additional location data for each congregation, including country, state, and the geographic coordinates of the meeting house. Of these, the majority are located in the

***Figure 1.** Distribution of Video Counts Over Time*



United States. Around a dozen are located in Canada and England, and only a handful from Australia, Germany, Netherlands, and New Zealand. While data capture rates varied (Figure 1), meeting coverage is most consistent from 2024 to mid-2025, a window that also represents the peak of geographical coverage in the dataset (see Figure 2). Accordingly, the overall dataset is best suited for analyzing English-language worship services in the United States during this eighteen-month period.

To assess the representativeness of our dataset, we compared the demographic characteristics of the captured counties against all U.S. counties with a recorded LDS presence (N=1,892) based on membership figures the LDS Church reported to the 2020 U.S. Religion Census. While the dataset only includes congregations from 136 U.S. counties, as seen in Table 1, the counties covered nevertheless account for around 59% of the US LDS population. The sample also exhibits high fidelity to the general population regarding certain

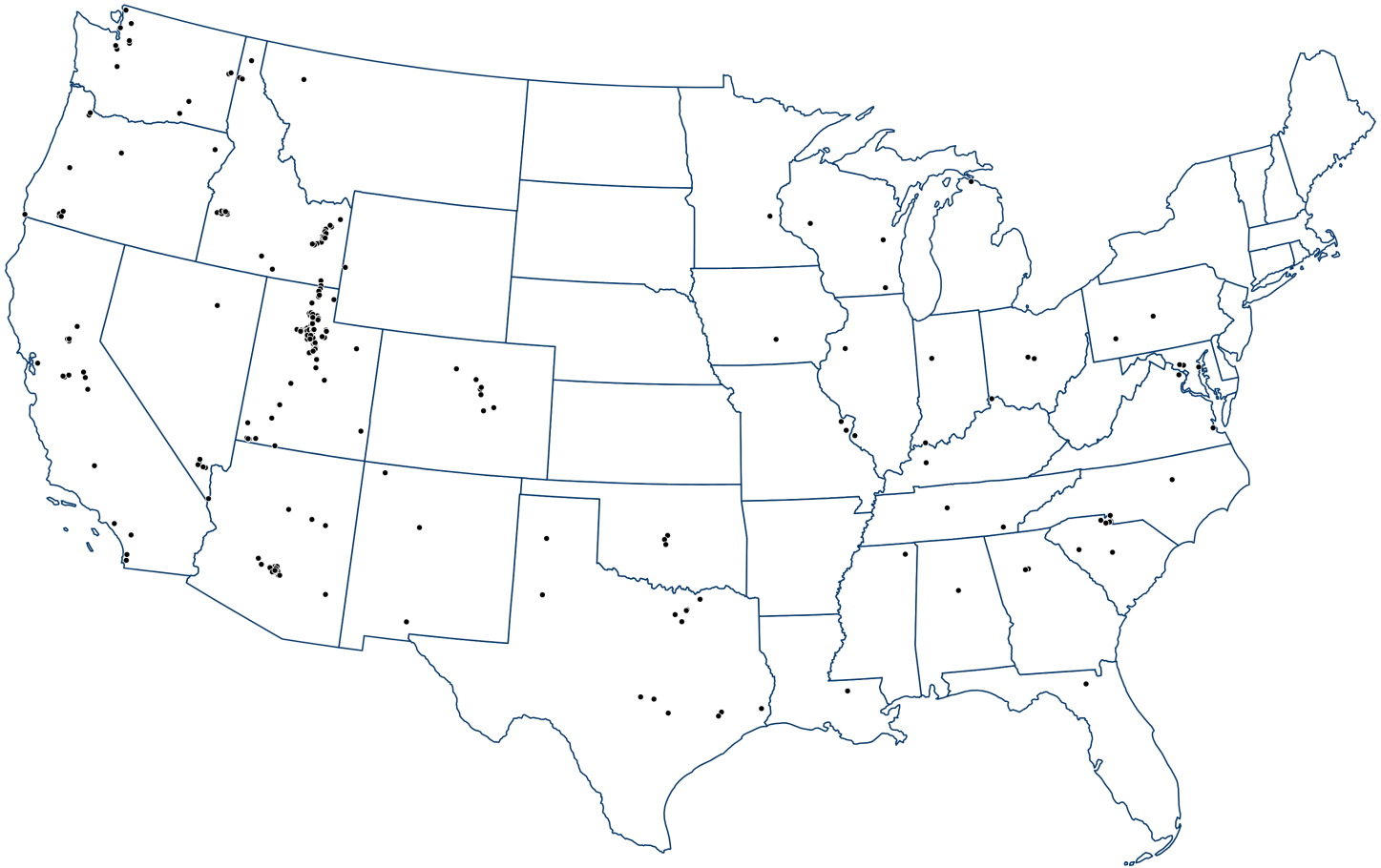
Table 1. Demographic & Political Representativeness of the YouTube Dataset

Characteristic	U.S. LDS Population (Universe, N=1,892)	YouTube Dataset (Sample, n=136)	
Study Coverage			**Coverage**
Total adherents (Count)	6,508,044	3,816,897	58.7%
Socio-Economic Indicators			**Difference**
Median household income	$86,028	$90,846	+$4,818
Married households (%)	53%	56%	+3%
Median age (years)	36.6	34.6	-2.0
Cultural and Political Indicators			**Difference**
2024 Trump vote share (%)	56%	58%	+2%
White population (%)	81%	83%	+2%
Geographic Indicators			**Difference**
Metro area residence (%)	85.4%	91.6%	+6.2%

Note: All means are weighted by county-level LDS adherent population density (2020) to reflect the characteristics of the average congregant rather than the average county.

Sources: *Religious Adherence*: The target population was defined using the 2020 U.S. Religion Census (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies), specifically the count of "Latter-day Saint" adherents per county. This served as the weighting variable for all representative analyses. *Socio-Economic and Demographic Indicators*: Economic data, including Median Household Income (Table S1901) and the Gini Index of Income Inequality (Table B19083), were sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates (2019–2023). Demographic baselines for age, sex, and racial composition were drawn from the Census Bureau's Vintage 2023 Population Estimates (PEP) and ACS 1-Year Subject Tables (S0101). *Geographic and Political Context*: Urban-rural classifications were determined using the 2023 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes (RUCC) from the USDA Economic Research Service. Political alignment was operationalized using certified 2024 presidential election returns from the MIT Election Data and Science Lab, calculating the two-party vote share at the county level.

***Figure 2.** Geographic Distribution of Video Dataset (Contiguous United States)*



demographic and political markers; differences in political alignment (Trump vote share), Gini Index, and racial composition (total white percentage) are minor. However, the dataset does appear to contain some moderate bias in representing a slightly younger (34.6 vs. 36.6 years), wealthier (+$4,818 median household income), and more metropolitan (91.6% vs. 85.4%) membership. While it is generally representative of the church's demographic core, it may under-represent rural and economically peripheral congregations.

Data Annotation

To render this dataset accessible for qualitative and quantitative research, we leveraged Large Language Models (LLMs) to perform several complex structural extraction tasks, including identifying meeting-level metadata, performing speaker segmentation, and inferring speaker attributes. This approach aligns with emerging research in computational social science that demonstrates how generative models can produce useful qualitative annotations (e.g., Gilardi et al. 2023; Than et al. 2025). Building on emerging best practices in this field, we utilized a multi-stage data annotation pipeline that used the Gemini API to transform our corpus of unstructured transcripts into a rich and structured dataset. We addressed many of the noted difficulties of working with LLMs for automated text annotation, extraction, and classification (e.g., Reiss 2023; Stuhler, Ton, and Ollion 2025; Stewart and Sinha 2025) by building in a set of guardrails to audit quality and prevent confabulation and schema drift.

Step 1: Prompting

Through an iterative development process, we designed a system prompt to ensure structural consistency and high-fidelity extraction across the corpus. The prompt included four main components:

Structured JSON Output: We defined a strict schema to capture transcript-level metadata (e.g., meeting type and list of hymns) alongside speaker level blocks. These blocks included specific attributes such as speech category (e.g., prayer, talk, musical number) and gender when explicitly stated (e.g., "brother" or "sister").

Classification Rules: To facilitate downstream quantitative analysis, all categorical fields were restricted to predefined value lists, preventing the "hallucination" of non-standard labels.

Verification: The model was required to output "confidence" and "reasoning" variables. While not included in the final analytical dataset, this "Chain-of-Thought" mechanism improved model performance by forcing the LLM to justify its classifications, while also providing a "paper trail" during the prompt refinement phase.

Verbatim Policy: To preserve the original source material, the prompt explicitly prohibited the LLM from "cleaning" or correcting the transcript text. This verbatim policy ensured that the extracted text blocks remained exact substrings of the original YouTube transcript, maintaining the integrity of the vernacular language.

Step 2: Accuracy Testing

To evaluate the reliability of the automated pipeline, we conducted a manual validation of a random sample of 100 transcripts. Recognizing that the spontaneous, less-structured nature of fast and testimony meetings, which lack pre-assigned speakers and formal topics, presents a higher technical challenge for speaker segmentation, we oversampled these services to ensure the model could maintain high fidelity during complex, high-turnover discourse. This resulted in a validation corpus of 2,271 individual speaker blocks. We then compared the outputs generated by Gemini 2.5 Pro against this expert-corrected "ground truth" dataset. As shown in Table 2, the model achieved accuracy rates exceeding 96% across all metadata categories, confirming the pipeline's robustness for large-scale sociological and linguistic analysis.

Step 3: Batch Processing and Quality Control

Once we were satisfied with the results, we utilized Gemini's batch API to process the transcripts in batches of around 500 transcripts at a time. Once they were finished being compiled, we integrated a series of post-processing quality control and validation measurements to prevent the introduction of artifacts or confabulated data. This included a strict validation of the JSON schema, ensuring that each of the categories was returned correctly. We also compared the original transcript against the returned text found in the speaker block sections, only keeping outputs where the input and output achieved a greater than 97% similarity score. This process, from iterative prompting to automated quality validation, ensured the resulting dataset is both structurally sound and linguistically faithful to the original source material.

Table 2. Variable Names, Categorical Options, and LLM Accuracy

Variable Name	Categorical Options	Accuracy (%)
meeting_type	sacrament_meeting, ward_conference, stake_conference, area_conference, funeral, other	100.0 (100/100)
fast_and_testimony	true/false	100.0 (100/100)
primary_program	true/false	100.0 (100/100)
hymns (set match)	List of strings	98.0 (98/100)
block_category	pre_post_meeting, announcements_business, music, prayer, talk, talk_missionary_farewell, talk_missionary_homecoming, testimony, baby_blessing, confirmation, other	98.7 (2242/2271)
gender	male, female, nonbinary, unknown	96.3 (2188/2271)
speaker_type	bishopric, stake_leader, area_authority, missionary_active, other_general_member	99.2 (2255/2271)
speaker_name	string	98.8 (2246/2271)
returned_missionary	true/false	99.7 (2265/2271)
speaker_age_bracket	child, youth, adult, or unknown	98.5 (2239/2271)

Data Overview

The dataset is organized to facilitate systematic inquiry into the structural and linguistic nature of weekly LDS worship. While the majority of the corpus comprises weekly sacrament meetings, the collection also captures other forms of local worship such as ward conferences, stake conferences, and funeral services. To analyze how the language of worship shifts across different contexts, we have included variables identifying which sacrament meetings are fast and testimony meetings and Primary programs (i.e., annual programs featuring the congregation's children). Within these services, the dataset categorizes distinct speech acts such as talks, testimonies, prayers, baby blessings, confirmations, and missionary farewells or homecomings. Beyond the spoken word, the inclusion of weekly hymns enables future research into regional musical preferences. Finally, to support sociolinguistic analysis, all speech categories are further stratified by attributed gender (identified through introductions or pronoun usage) and age bracket (child, youth, adult).

Table 3. Corpus Composition by Meeting Type

Meeting Type	Count (Services)
Sacrament meeting	12,721
Fast and testimony	*3,223*
Primary program	*329*
Ward conference	247
Stake conference	107
Funeral service	188
Other/unknown	449
Total Unique Services	**13,712**

As of the writing of this paper, we have so far processed over 13,000 sacrament meeting talks from the year 2024. As outlined in Table 3, this dataset represents a significant cross-section of contemporary LDS worship. The majority of these are weekly sacrament meetings (12,721), with other meeting types including 247 ward conferences, 107 stake conferences, and 188 funeral services. Within these meetings, we successfully isolated 3,223 fast and testimony meetings and 329 Primary programs, subsets large enough to support distinct sub-genre analyses.

At the speech level, the dataset comprises 272,690 distinct blocks of text. The classification pipeline successfully partitioned the main components of the sacrament meeting service, identifying 54,346 formal talks, 37,015 testimonies, and 28,844 prayers. Beyond these key oratorical forms, the dataset captures the liturgical and administrative framework of the services, including over 61,000 instances of ecclesiastical business and announcements, alongside 66,000 musical events. Furthermore, the pipeline successfully identified specialized subcategories of discourse, such as 2,247 missionary farewells and homecomings, as well as 602 ordinances for the naming and blessing of children (see Table 4). Speaker demographics, as detailed in Table 5, reveal both interesting patterns and notable limitations. Identifiable male speakers outnumber female speakers in the corpus. However, a substantial proportion of talks and testimonies were classified as "unknown," the model's default designation when gendered titles (e.g., "Brother" or "Sister") or pronouns were absent from the transcript. With this caveat in mind, the data nevertheless suggests that men occupy a disproportionate share of the liturgical space, appearing to speak and pray more frequently than women. Furthermore, and consistent with institutional norms, adult voices overwhelmingly dominate the corpus compared to youth and child participants.

Table 4. Distribution of Speech Blocks

Speech Category	Count (Blocks)
Liturgical/Spoken	
Talks (General)	54,346
Testimonies	37,015
Prayers	28,844
Talks (missionary farewell/homecoming)	2,247
Baby blessings	602
Confirmations	162
Administrative/Structural	
Music	66,311
Announcements/business	61,409
Pre/post meeting chatter	14,173
Total Blocks	**272,690**

Potential for Future Research

The dataset is organized to answer a broad range of questions regarding the nature of weekly LDS worship. For scholars of religion, the corpus offers a robust case study for testing the dynamics of lived religion within a highly structured and "correlated" environment. Because the LDS Church utilizes a system of geographic assignment rather than voluntary "church shopping," it provides a natural experiment for assessing the major drivers of religious discourse. Researchers can explore the extent to which local political leanings, socioeconomic factors, gender identity, or ecclesiastical rank shape religious scripts. By identifying the specific moments where personal narratives intersect with or deviate from correlated manuals, this dataset allows for a granular mapping of the tension between top-down institutional requirements and the vernacular theology of the pews (e.g., Orsi 1985; Ammerman 2016; Hangen 2015). Within the field of Mormon studies, this collection enables a large-scale

Table 5. Gender and Age Distribution by Speech Categories (Speaker Counts)

	Male	Female	Unknown	Adult	Youth	Child	Unknown
Talks	24,202	16,706	13,438	40,058	6,792	6,373	1,123
Prayers	14,757	11,366	2,721	24,670	1,456	235	2,483
Testimonies	11,526	10,165	15,324	28,167	3,811	3,054	1,983

quantitative analysis of unique liturgical genres. For example, scholars have noted how the practice of testimony bearing, typically the least "scripted" form of speech in the LDS context, has become increasingly formulaic over time. It remains an important site of community bonding where members share selective experiences in structured ways that demonstrate the efficacy of the gospel and divine presence in the quotidian (Knowlton 1991; Gilkey 1994; Riess 2001). This dataset now allows researchers to interrogate these patterns with unprecedented geographic coverage and scale. Furthermore, the substantial body of missionary speeches provides a significant resource for analyzing the linguistic features of what has been termed the "Missionary Voice" (Stanley et al. 2024). These preliminary notes only scratch the surface of the corpus's potential. Ultimately, by moving beyond official institutional discourse to the level of the local congregation, this dataset offers a new lens into how doctrine is perceived, reinterpreted, and performed by the laity on a weekly basis.

Note on Privacy and Accessibility: While the worship services in this dataset were sourced from public platforms like YouTube, we recognize that removing this content from its original context raises ethical concerns. Following best practices in digital ethnography, we maintain that data "viewability" does not automatically equate to "public" status for research purposes (Walsh 2023). To protect the privacy of the participants, we have restricted access to the full dataset. Aggregate data is available via the Purdue University Research Repository (PURR) at [DOI: 10.4231/RAQA-3X85]. Researchers seeking access to the full dataset can apply through the process outlined on PURR. Access to the complete corpus is restricted to verified researchers for non-commercial research purposes only.

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Note on Generative AI Use: Generative AI was employed as a core methodological component of this research, with specific applications detailed in the sections above. Beyond its analytical role, AI tools were utilized to assist in code development, debugging, and the refinement of data visualizations. All AI-assisted outputs were rigorously reviewed and validated by the authors to ensure accuracy and reproducibility.

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