



An Open Letter to the Office of the First Presidency

by Sean Thomas | Nov 29, 2015 | Featured, Homosexuality, Mormonism | 3 comments



An Open Letter To:

The Office of the First Presidency

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

After much prayer, I am writing to implore you to reconsider the Church's new policy on the treatment of same-gender families and to address this matter more

clearly and lovingly and within the context of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I appreciate your desire to protect the doctrine. These policies do not do so.

Many LDS families, including mine, are troubled by the new policy guidelines of the Church regarding the treatment of same-gender families. This policy requires direct and frank responses from the First Presidency so that Church members may make educated decisions for and with our families. Simply directing members to pray and talk with local ecclesiastic leaders are insufficient for this highly charged yet extremely sensitive discussion. Elder Christofferson's interview, while appreciated, addressed the policy only superficially. The recent communication with additional guidance was inadequate.

I have reviewed these matters with my Stake Presidency. They do not have the answers. As these are policy matters, only the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles can address them.

As the Church has now opened this door, it is time an open and interactive dialogue on matters of sexuality and the role of the Church in this very intimate activity. Many of the troubling matters are noted below. In some cases, these comments are, of necessity, rather blunt:

The Church's policy appears to be a new McCarthyism. The Church position will encourage its members to report each other's actions to ecclesiastical leaders for unnecessary and harsh disciplinary action. This will be the practical outcome of the Church's new policy among some of our members who are more concerned with the salvation of their neighbors than their personal salvation. How will the Church handle such "witch" hunts?

President Boyd K. Packer stated with respect to the Church's LGB members, "We do not reject you. ... We cannot reject you. ... We will not reject you, because we love you." And yet, calling members who are in same-gender marriages apostates is a clear rejection of LGB members and their families.

The suicide rate among LGB Mormons is already too high (it's irrelevant to argue whether it is higher or lower than other groups - the body of Christ should view any suicide that is due to a lack of acceptance and love as too high.) LGB Mormons view the Church's policy as yet another demoralizing event demonstrating their worthlessness in the eyes of the Church. Already we are seeing increased calls to suicide telephone lines. This policy is reckless.

It is irresponsible for the Church to issue these policies at a time when religious zealots, supported by several US Presidential candidates, are calling for homosexuals to be put to death.

“We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression.” The new policy, as it relates to children of same-gender parents is clearly contrary to the 2nd Article of Faith because it creates a separate class of youth that can never receive a name and a blessing and who can only accept the Gospel once they are of legal age, only after specifically renouncing the sins of their fathers, and after appealing directly to The First Presidency. The policy and doctrine cannot be reconciled.

The Church states that children are pure and, if they die, will die in Christ. However, Church leaders have also stated on many occasions that this only extends to children that are under age 8 as this is the age at which a child may make decisions about membership. Does this ‘pure state’ now extend to age 18? If so, any sexual or other sinful impropriety during teenage years, is by definition, pure. Or, is this just a grace period for some youth but not others.

The Church’s new policy will lead to increased promiscuity as unbaptized youth of some LDS families will have no baptismal commitment to encourage their adhere to good standards. This is not good.

Not allowing the children of same gender relationships to be blessed or to be baptized unless and until the individual renounces their parents loving relationship will fracture families. This is counter to all I believe. When my wife sought to join the Church as a 17 year old daughter of a Catholic family, the Church simply asked that her parents’ consent. Certainly that would address the legal and moral questions that might arise for children of same-gender couples.

Elder Christofferson commented that the policy protects children. That is not true. If it were, the Church would prohibit all youth that are not raised in LDS families, from being baptized until they are age 18 regardless of parental consent. The same arguments that Elder Christofferson used for same-gender families are just as valid for children of Catholic, evangelical, atheist, Jewish, agnostic and other non-LDS parents because baptism into the Church requires an acceptance of the LDS faith. Even with parental consent, familial strife rooted in religion is common.

It is unconscionable to divide the loyalties of children that have divorced parents where one parent is active in the Church and the other desires a same-gender

relationship. These children and youth should have every opportunity for Church blessings and membership consistent with their and their parents' desires while they are in their formative years, regardless of custody decisions.

D&C 20:70 makes no exceptions for the blessing of children. If the Church is modifying its scriptures this must be done by revelation rather than by handbook policy. Is this new policy a direct Revelation from God?

Are children born to certain LDS parents now to receive a name and a blessing at age 18 or will this blessing simply not be available to selected children? Giving a name and a blessing at age 18 is certainly a departure in doctrine, but otherwise the Church denies certain children of this ordinance.

D&C 20:37 also has no carve-outs for the baptism of youth who live with same-gender parents. Again if Church doctrine is to be changed it should be by revelation. Is this change a direct Revelation from God?

Treating those who are same-gender-married as apostates will result in turning the hearts of parents and children against each other. And yet the same standard is not applied consistently to opposite sex unmarried cohabitating couples, pre-marital sexual activity (much of which is unnatural by most LDS definitions) or abusive spouses. Turning one against another will become a self-fulfilling prophesy if this policy is enforced. This is counter to a family-focused Church.

Since the Church opposes promiscuity, not allowing gay individuals who were raised in LDS households and who later understand their sexual feelings, to have a hope for a monogamous committed relationship, while retaining Church membership, will encourage increased promiscuity among members that have same sex attractions but who are afraid of the family rejection that will accompany being branded with the apostasy label. Rather than cowering in the shadows, let's embrace our brothers and sisters with same-gender attractions, love them and accept them, just as our Savior would do and as Elder Packer promised.

Since the Church does not truly recognize any marriage not performed in an LDS Temple as an Eternal Marriage. Any marriage (same-gender or opposite-gender) performed outside the LDS authority is secular and should be irrelevant to the Church. As with how the Church once treated persons of African ancestry, this appears to be the Church conforming to certain conservative social and cultural trends.

As the Church has stated, no action will be taken against any member who publicly supports same gender marriage, but those who actually engage in a same-gender marriage are now apostates. To state that members may support same-gender marriage while treating those in same-gender marriages as an apostasy, is rather hypocritical.

The Church leaders already acknowledge that most LDS will not make it to the Celestial Kingdom. That must mean that God has a plan for everyone else. Perhaps LGB people were not intended to become gods in their own right. Perhaps they are created for other purposes like ministering angels or using another talent such as music, literature or culinary abilities. After all, much of the sacred music that we all love was composed by composers who acted on same-sex attractions. Shall we ban music composed by Schubert, Handel, Copland, Bitten, Tchaikovsky, Porter, and Novello? Shall we ban the works of Wilde, Whitman, Dickinson, Woolf, Proust, and Mann? Should we ban the great art of Michelangelo and Da Vinci? Perhaps, God gave these gifted people a 'gay gene' so that they would develop a talent for creating faith-promoting art that can be enjoyed through the eternities. Perhaps the talents of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters are best nourished through Church membership than abandoned through excommunication.

Through most of its history, the Church taught that persons of African ancestry were unworthy of certain blessings. While we now know that it was not scriptural doctrine nor revelation, it was preached and taught by the prophets as though it were. The Church has stated that its leaders simply acceded to the cultural norms of the times and that this was really just racism. When I was a missionary and questioned the Church policy, I was told to pray and, I would know it was from God. (I did, and it wasn't.) How are we to now accept this position on same-gender families as other than the Church succumbing to historical perspectives tainted by the views of an aging leadership? Do we really believe this will withstand the test of time or shall we wait for a hundred years and pray for a Revelation to correct an improper policy that can be better addressed now?

If the Savior felt strongly about homosexuality why did He not talk about it directly? Perhaps because Christ fulfilled the Old Testament laws and taught that loving ones neighbor was infinitely more important than same-sex attractions. If loving our neighbor is the greatest command, isn't 'not loving' our neighbor the greatest sin? These policies fuel hatred and abandonment.

Perhaps the Savior did speak of homosexuality in Matthew 19:12 by referring to our gay brothers and sisters as 'eunuchs from birth' or 'eunuchs by men' (i.e., genetic.) Who are we to judge and condemn the creations of God simply because of our lack of understanding?

The Church's position on homosexuality has changed over the years. I suspect that this is because the Church really doesn't know how to address this delicate matter. For example, the Church previously excommunicated homosexuals quickly for simply expressing an interest in same-sex attractions, BYU used to conduct Church-sanctioned electrode reparative and other highly questionable therapies to cure what is now considered a natural desire or a genetic trait among some people. In early Church history, even some unrelated same-sex males were sealed to each other in marriage-like Temple ceremonies. Now it's ok to be gay along as desires are not acted upon. Many Church members, given the high Utah pornography use, seem to actually just follow a don't-ask-don't-tell perspective. How are Church members to reconcile these actions and evolutions? The new policy will simply drive some members into more damaging and imported secretive behavior. This is contrary to how a loving church should help support its people.

The true enemy to our doctrine is pornography, hate, spouse and child abuse, pedophilia, anger, murder and promiscuity. Loving same-gender monogamous marriages encourage none of those evils. However, treating same-gender marriages as evil and apostate encourages people not to aspire to loving relationships but to engage in promiscuity. Imagine the young man or woman who desires marriage and is willing to save their desires for marriage, but is told by his/her church that this can never be achieved in this life because of their same-gender attraction. How sad of the Church to treat our LGB members in such a manner.

The Church position leaves no room for same-gender couples who are celibate in their relationship to not be branded as apostates. Some individuals, whether same or opposite sex, may choose marriage simply for legal expediency. Having the 1000+ legal benefits of marriage can be important to people who simply want to ensure things like health care decisions, property ownership and, inheritance rights when there are no blood relatives they can rely on. Older and childless individuals may choose such relationships to care for each other without introducing sexuality into the equation. Legal partnerships are not permitted by law, so 'marriage' is a viable legal arrangement for some. While some of marital

legal benefits can be achieved contractually, it is impossible to replicate all these legal protections in ways that would protect the parties across all States and in all circumstances. Are these celibate persons also apostates simply for using a law in a creative, but morally reasonable, way?

"We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law." I applaud Elder Oaks statements that governmental officials should follow the laws of the land and issue marriage licenses to same-gender couples. And yet the Church pled guilty to 13 counts of willfully violating the law in the matter of Proposition 8 with nary apology to its members for violating its foundational tenant of 12th Article of Faith.

How can we 'obey, honor and sustain the law' when the Church specifically treats certain monogamously-married people as apostates and others as not? When I was a missionary, we were taught by Church authorities that the 12th Article of Faith was the premise under which the Church accepted the marriages of couples married by an authority other than the LDS Church. Now that same-sex marriage is legal, the Church has changed its basis for accepting certain non-LDS marriages. Accordingly all non-LDS authority marriages are really not doctrinally accepted by the Church.

Sustain: "to support as true, legal, or just" "uphold, affirm, or confirm the justice or validity of." Honor: "to show respect" "to treat with deference." "to revere." While the new policy 'obeys' the law, it clearly does not 'honor' or 'sustain' it as required by our own doctrine.

Handbook 1 treats this matter similar to polygamist families. Treating polygamy as a state of apostasy does 'obey, honor and sustain' the law. These are not the same and the Brethren simply stating that they are does not make it so.

How does same-gender marriage correlate to polygamy? Polygamy was practiced with God's blessing in both the bible and by good Mormons (in the early days of the church) and is consistent with D&C 132. It only became an apostasy when the USA made it illegal, which is consistent with the 12th Article of Faith. Same-gender marriage, on the other hand, became legal in the USA and in other countries. The comparison just isn't logical and the doctrine is inconsistent with the new policy.

While I applaud the Church's recent topical discussion on polygamy, questions remain. The Church owes its members a true and clear explanation. If truth never changes, polygamy is truly an apostasy, then the Church should posthumously

excommunicate and nullify the ordinances of all who previously practiced it and should not allow members to be sealed to more than one spouse. Instead of treating these past 'transgressors' as 'posthumous apostates,' we correctly revere them as saints while, questionably, treating current transgressors as apostates. And yet, this appears to be contrary to the New and Everlasting Covenant of D&C 132. The difference is simply that one is performed with the authority of the Church and the other is not. This goes to my earlier point that the Church shouldn't doctrinally accept any marriage other than those performed under its authority. Accordingly all non-LDS marriages are irrelevant. (Please note that I do not support polygamy, even though it was practiced in both the early Church and in traditional biblical God-sanctioned relationships.)

The Church properly makes murder, rape, child abuse, and spouse abuse and pedophilia sins, but its policies do not mandate disciplinary councils for these heinous sins. How can a legal loving monogamous relationship between two same individuals of the same gender possibly be worse than those horrific sins?

The Church teaches that sex is intended solely for procreation between a male and a female. Yet sex in opposite-gender LDS marriages is often abusive, non-consensual, masturbatory, recreational, unnatural, and not intended to result in children. For example, in the early 80's, oral sex was considered worthy of a disciplinary process and a policy was put in place; a few months later that policy was withdrawn. Oral and other forms of sex that cannot result in procreation now appear to be ok as long as both partners feel that it is ok. As Church policies appear to focus on intimate behavior, these types of sexual intimacy should be addressed frankly and honestly as a violation of policy and make a couple unworthy for membership and/or Temple recommends. Alternatively (and probably much better) is to understand human sexuality within monogamous marriages as more than purely for procreation. Why do Church policies and handbooks not discuss or address sexual activity that cannot result in conception if this is so critically important?

If the Church accepts the premise that some opposite-gender couples, whether by desire or biology, may have sex to demonstrate their love, for psychological wholeness, or for recreational release rather than for procreation, why must people with same-gender desires be denied such intimacy in monogamous loving marriages or even through masturbatory releases?

While I appreciate that the Brethren believe this policy change is out of love, they do not appear to understand and appreciate the harsh realities of how cruel many Church members and Ward leaders actually treat people in their congregations. The reality is that LDS members, Stake Presidencies and Bishoprics, in spite of your counsel, often treat people that have even slight differences of opinion on gender attraction and identification, politics, business, health issues, and other matters completely unrelated to doctrine, with disdain. This has been my experience in my current and prior Wards and Stakes. The new policies will exacerbate the challenges of congregation life and make the already challenging callings of Bishop and Stake President even harder for lay leaders that do not have any training in these areas.

Here are my suggestions:

I encourage the Church to follow the same practice as it did (albeit unjustly) with persons of African ancestry: accept monogamously married same-gender couples into membership (or at least do not shun previously baptized members as apostates when they enter into monogamous same-gender marriages), while I understand the need to withholding priesthood, leadership and Temple blessings. This is the example of Christ. Neither He nor John the Baptist interviewed people prior to baptism to inquire whether their parents were gay or about their sexual activities. He and John accepted all persons, loved them and baptized them.

I encourage the Church to accept same-sex celebrate-marriages of members, entered into for legal expediency.

I encourage the Church to not only obey, but to also honor and sustain the law by accepting same-gender monogamous marriages of previously baptized members while withholding certain blessings from such members.

I encourage the Church to bless and name babies of all members rather than deny this ordinance altogether. Let us follow the example of our Savior when he said: Suffer the little children to come unto me.

I encourage the Church to accept youth into membership if his/her legal guardian (s) agree to the choice. There is no need for the Church leaders to make same-gender families a divisive issue. What is needed is compassion, love and appreciation for each other. This is not achieved through exclusion.

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I encourage the Church to embrace our brothers and sisters who have same-sex attractions. Not all members must hold Temple recommends, exercise the

Priesthood or serve in leadership callings. However, all our brothers and sisters, regardless of gender attraction/orientation, are deserving of our unconditional love and acceptance. Excommunication will simply alienate good people and will drive them (and their families) away from the Church. As Elder Packer stated, "We do not reject you."

Lastly, at a minimum, I encourage the Church to hold these controversial policies in abeyance while ramifications are explored further.

President Monson, the Church prays for your health and that the hearts of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will be softened on this matter. As the Church has not made its handbook guidance a formal position of doctrine through revelation, members of the LDS Church implore you to re-evaluate these policy positions before more harm is done.

Sincerely,

A loving worthy LDS member and father

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