

Late Night Thoughts on the LDS Church's Policy on Gay Parents & Their Children

by Robert Rees | Nov 29, 2015 | Family, Featured, Homosexuality, Policy, Theology | 4 comments



NOTE: For the past several weeks I have considered how best to respond to the LDS Church's policy changes on gay and lesbian parents and their children. I resisted a quick response because I feel this is a complicated matter that deserves careful, thoughtful consideration. Upon first hearing the news of the policy change, I was both disturbed and distraught. At a time when it seemed the Church was moving in a progressive or at least positive direction on issues relating to its LGBT members, this policy seems a sudden lurch backward and out of harmony with other recent statements and sentiments by Church leaders on LGBT issues. When friends began calling or writing asking my thoughts, I simply said that it didn't make sense to me spiritually, culturally, socially, politically or, especially, emotionally. It still doesn't—nor do I expect it will. Nevertheless, I have an impulse to try and respond. I've divided my response into sections that might help readers zero in on particular issues, concerns or hopes.

Personal Perspective

I came of age in a homophobic world, a world in which my family, friends, church leaders, fellow

members, teachers and almost everyone I knew saw homosexuality as an evil perversion. "Queer" and "pervert" were common terms used in my home, and I was taught to avoid and fear gay men and even abuse them physically. My friends in Long Beach talked seriously about "rolling some queers down at the Pike" (an arcade). When I saw men showing romantic affection for one another, I was repulsed and even felt my fists tighten in anger. Everything in my culture reinforced such feelings. At BYU I often heard disparaging remarks about students rumored to be gay, and as a young missionary I remember speaking disparagingly behind the backs of missionaries reported to be gay as "sisters." As a leader of the Honor Society at BYU I was aware of the fact that being homosexual was against the honor code and heard of gays being called up before university and church authorities.

When I left BYU for graduate school at the University of Wisconsin in 1960, my attitudes began to change because I had openly gay teachers and fellow students who seemed perfectly normal except for the fact that they loved people of their own gender in the way I loved my wife. However, I was still convinced that homosexuality was a sin and a perverse one at that. I was also taught by Church leaders that homosexuality was a chosen and changeable condition. It wasn't until I moved into the Los Angeles Stake and started teaching at UCLA in 1966 that I began to become acquainted with actual gay Latter-day Saints. That and serious study convinced me that the Church's teaching about choice/change was wrong. But it was when I was called to be bishop of the Los Angeles Singles' Ward in 1986, nearly thirty years ago, that I truly understood the devastating impact of the Church's teachings on the LGBT members of my little flock—and throughout the Church. The fear, shame, and self-loathing experienced by LGBT members of my congregation, who for the most part were good, faithful, often even exemplary members of the Church, led me to think more deeply, to search the scriptures more closely, and to read the scientific literature more seriously. From that moment, I became an ally on behalf of LGBT Latter-day Saints, and have remained so, working from within the Church but nevertheless with conviction that its deeply entrenched teachings were destructive to individual members, to the very fabric of the Church and, more importantly, to the central teaching of Christ's gospel. It is because I consider this new policy so harmful to my gay brothers and sisters and their families, especially their children, that I feel compelled to respond,

A Scriptural Perspective

"In those days people will no longer say, 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' Jeremiah 31:29

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children's teeth are set on edge'? "As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore." Ezekiel 18:1-4

The meaning of the proverb about the fathers eating sour grapes and the children's teeth being set on edge was used in ancient Israel, often in reference to children suffering the consequence of exile due to their parents' unrighteousness. But it is clear from God's explicit instructions to both Jeremiah and Ezekiel that such an ethic was repugnant to him and should cease to be taught. Sixty years ago when as a twenty-year old missionary accompanying the Northern States Mission President, Richard C. Stratford, and the visiting general authority, Marion "Duff" Hanks, on a tour of the Northern States Mission, I remember, in reference to a situation where someone was blaming

children for something their parents had done, Elder Hanks saying with passion in his voice, "Let this doctrine be taught no more in Israel!" And yet the Church seems to be teaching something akin to this with its new restrictive policy regarding the children of single, co-habiting or married gay and lesbian parents receiving the blessings and ordinances of gospel.

Following what seems a public relations disaster, the Church immediately undertook to "clarify" the new policy by posting an interview with Elder Todd Christofferson of the Council of Twelve Apostles and an editorial by Michael Otterson, Managing Director of Church Public Affairs). In my estimation, neither succeeded in explaining or clarifying the new policy. Given the reaction of those most immediately and dramatically impacted by the policy change—gay and lesbian parents and their children—it is difficult to make sense of the explanation that the motivation behind the change was "a desire to protect children in their innocence and in their minority years." This seems to suggest that somehow the children of loving gay parents need to be protected from those parents and that receiving the blessings and ordinances of the gospel could in some way negatively impact these children's welfare and wellbeing. The discrimination and potential ostracism these children are likely to experience seem a high price to pay for such "protection."

For Otterson to say that the new information was "an instructional document to leadership throughout the world" that, apparently, was not intended for general consumption seems at best naive given the nature of modern electronic communication. He couldn't have been unaware of the possibility of a leak or of the instantaneous communication of such a dramatic and potentially disturbing change in policy throughout the Mormon world, no matter what its source or intention. After all, he is the Managing Director of Church Public Affairs.

"All are alike unto God"

The Book of Mormon teaches that Christ not only "denieth none that come unto him," but "inviteth them to come and partake of his goodness" (2 Nephi 28:33). To the categories of equality (black-white, bond-free, male-female and Jew-Gentile), the new policy seems to cry out for at least one more: gay parents and their children—straight parents and their children. That is, one of the elements of the new policy that is most inexplicable is the distinction it makes between parents and children of homosexual and heterosexual parents. How can Church leaders justify treating children of gay and lesbian parents differently than it proposes treating children born out of wedlock to single, co-habiting or common-law married heterosexuals? How can the Church now label as "apostasy" behavior that it gave no warning would be so treated? Further, how can Church leaders label such marriages, entered into both in good faith and in an attempt to provide stable, loving homes for children, as "apostasy" when it has not treated a range of other serious transgressions (fornication, adultery, treason, fraud, embezzlement, etc.) as apostasy—or put the children born to such parents into a separate category?

If the Church considers being in a gay relationship, married or otherwise, as "Repeatedly act[ing] in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the Church or its leaders," shouldn't it also label cohabiting heterosexual relationships as such, especially when fornication and adultery are included in the General Handbook as "serious transgressions"? Further, if a "disciplinary council must be held for a member who demonstrates a pattern of serious transgression," and that behavior is "widely known," which generally it is in the case of heterosexual cohabitation and "abandonment of family responsibilities," then how can such behavior be treated less strictly?

In addition, how can the Church justify its draconian policy toward such parents and children when it has no similar policy for children of heterosexual parents who neglect, abuse or abandon their

children—or for parents who are guilty of serious transgressions such as murder, rape, incest, child abuse and similar crimes? How can the children of active/devoted gay married parents be seen as less worthy to receive the saving ordinances of the gospel than children of inactive, disobedient straight parents? Which parents are more likely to teach their children the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule—or to pay tithing, keep the Word of Wisdom and keep the Sabbath holy? Which child is more likely to love the Savior, keep God's commandments and serve others? As someone who suffered and survived physical, emotional and sexual abuse as a child in a series of broken, dysfunctional homes and as someone who knows a number of extremely loving, nurturing and responsible gay and lesbian parents, I find the new policy baffling.

Three Families, Three Stories

If my first response to hearing the reports of the new policy was disbelief, my second was surely sadness, an emotion I have experienced frequently and abundantly over the many years I have been dealing with the plight of my LGBT Latter-day Saint brothers and sisters and their families. My mind was flooded with the heartbreak, the fractured families, the loneliness, the despair, and the suicides, especially of those who, because of false teachings, have been convinced that they are unloved and unlovable—by their families, their church and their God.

I imagined the multiplication of such suffering and sorrow stemming from these new policies. Specifically, I thought of friends, faithful Latter-day Saints, who have five children, all of whom served missions and four of whom married in the temple. Their fifth child, after many failed attempts at an opposite-sex relationship, found a same-sex partner and, when it became legal, married and then with his husband adopted a boy and girl. The boy, baptized by his grandfather two years ago, has been preparing for the priesthood with the other eleven-year olds in his ward. How can he understand that the parents who rescued him and his sister from a foster home are worthy of excommunication from the same church they have taught him to honor? His sister, now seven, has been excitedly planning for her baptism along with two of her cousins of the same age. How can anyone explain to this child and her grandfather that because of her parents' relationship he cannot baptize her? And how will both of these children feel when it comes time for them and their cousins to serve missions and they will be required to first renounce their parents' marriage before they can serve? What logic can be used to explain this policy to this faithful family of sixth and seven generation Latter-day Saints, some of whose ancestors abandoned homes and families in Europe to immigrate to the United States and who crossed the plains and mountains to reach Zion? Their family history includes prophets and apostles, general Relief Society and Primary leaders, patriarchs, stake presidents, bishops and women's leaders. How can anyone explain that their son and brother is somehow unworthy of the blessings to the church their family has served faithfully for nearly two hundred years?

I also think of a lesbian couple I know, both of whom served faithful missions and afterwards married heterosexual partners with whom they established homes and had children. Though both were faithful to their husbands, after five and seven years, respectfully, neither could sustain the intimacy required by their husbands and reluctantly divorced, each taking several of their children and living as single parents. Although maintaining firm testimonies of the gospel, each considered herself beyond the fellowship of the Church. Surprisingly, they met one another when an inspired Relief Society president and a loving bishop reached out and invited them, respectfully, to return to activity. They have been lovingly accepted by their California ward. When the California Supreme Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage, they solemnized their marriage, primarily out of a desire

to provide their children with legitimacy, but also because they felt that by marrying they would be more conforming to the Church's ideal. One of these sisters has a daughter approaching baptismal age, and the other has a son who has been preparing for a mission. These good sisters are distraught over the Church's new policy and fearful that their ecclesiastical leaders will feel compelled to take action against them that will dramatically impact their own and their children's lives.

The First Presidency's clarification of its policy issued on 13 November 2015 makes what seems an arbitrary distinction between children who live less than half time and "those children whose primary residence is with a couple living in a same-gender marriage or similar relationship." It is hard for me to make sense of such a distinction, especially when most children have little if any say about such arrangements. The policy also seems contradictory to the following statement in the First Presidency's letter: "All children are to be treated with utmost respect and love. They are welcome to attend Church meetings and participate in Church activities. All children may receive priesthood blessings of healing and spiritual guidance." The policy also seems to contradict the following statement on "Families and the Church in God's Plan" found in the Handbook: "[The Church] provides the priesthood authority to administer the ordinances of salvation and exaltation to all who are worthy and willing to accept them." Surely, in a church that has as a cardinal principle the innate innocence and goodness of children, the children who fit into the narrow category the Church has established for gay families are worthy of such ordinances.

As Elder Bruce R. McConkie articulates in "The Salvation of Little Children," "Among all the glorious gospel verities given of God to his people there is scarcely a doctrine so sweet, so soul satisfying, and so soul sanctifying, as the one which proclaims—Little children shall be saved. They are alive in Christ and shall have eternal life. For them the family unit will continue, and the fullness of exaltation is theirs. No blessing shall be withheld." While that statement seems to suggest a comprehensive futurity, it is hard to imagine how it could not apply to any child whose parents wish such blessings for their child, or for any child who might wish them for him- or herself.

Seeing this seemingly arbitrary distinction, I immediately thought of another friend who bore twins while in a mixed gender marriage. When that marriage failed, she and her husband each took primary care of one of the twins. These boys are now approaching baptismal age. According to the First Presidency's letter, the child living with a gay parent may be denied baptism until he is eighteen while his brother experiences no such restriction. How in God's world does that make sense? How does it make sense for a child who was blessed or baptized before the policy was established to enjoy the blessings of Church membership when a younger sibling will now be denied such blessings?

The news media and the internet are being flooded with stories, most heart-breaking, of gay and lesbian parents and their children similarly caught between family and faith. But there are also wonderful stories of church leaders and congregations reaching out to these families with love, showing Christ-like compassion for their plight. They are fulfilling the great lesson Jesus teaches in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew about responding to others who are considered "the least," as some of these LGBT sisters and brothers and their children certainly are—and increasingly will be, unless the Church abandons or significantly modifies these new policies. The compassion being shown to these members reminds me of another story told me by Elder Hanks. After punishing one of his daughters for some minor infraction and making her stand in a corner, one of his other daughters came into the room and, after sizing up the situation, went to the corner and put her

arms around her sister and wept with her, which touched their father's heart. Regardless of how or whether the Church modifies these new policies, members are under covenant to respond with love and compassion.

Doctrine vs. Policy

“... trying to nail down doctrine like some huge and much-torn tent in the wind.”

In a recent article in the Salt Lake Tribune titled “New Mormon edict on gays is a ‘policy,’ experts note, and LDS policies ‘come and go,’” Peggy Fletcher Stack makes the distinction between doctrine and practice and quotes Professor Patrick Mason as saying, “Mormonism has a set of theological principles, which crystallize into particular doctrines, then are implemented and enforced through a series of policies. . . . [Policy] becomes the administrative fleshing out of the church’s doctrines.” But, as Stack acknowledges, “the line between the two can be blurry and difficult to distinguish.” In actual practice, this often turns out to be a distinction without a difference. The main problem, especially for lay members, as Stack illustrates, is that Church leaders sometimes teach something as doctrine, only later to declare it policy—and vice versa. This was certainly the case with the denial of priesthood and temple blessings to blacks of African descent, a teaching that was taught and defended as doctrine by First Presidencies and Quorums of the Twelve for over a hundred years. In spite of the fact that President David O. McKay considered it policy rather than doctrine in the 1960s, Elders Joseph fielding Smith, Mark E. Peterson, Bruce R. McConkie and many other general authorities continued to teach it as if it were doctrine, although acknowledging that it might eventually be changed.

It wasn’t until Lester Bush, Jr. published his landmark article, “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview” in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* in 1973 that we knew for the first time that that particular teaching, whether “doctrine” or “policy,” was not based on revelation, inspiration or any other kind of truth but rather was based on mythology, folklore, and a serious misreading of scripture, all of which was finally confirmed by the Church’s own official statement published in February 2012. That document, “Race and the Church: All Are Alike Unto God,” states, “Some explanations with respect to this matter [i.e., priesthood denial] were made in the absence of direct revelation and references to these explanations are sometimes cited in publications. These previous personal statements do not represent Church doctrine.” It also states categorically, “The Church unequivocally condemns racism [which the teaching clearly reflected], including any and all past racism by individuals [including, by implication, general authorities] both inside and outside the Church.”

Although Michael Otterson goes to some lengths to emphasize that the letter to area and local authorities spelling out policy changes in the General Handbook “was an instructional document” and that the widespread negative response to the change revealed “a general lack of understanding of the Handbook” itself, he knows, or else should know, that the Handbook carries inordinate weight. In such a hierarchically-driven church as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints most leaders, certainly at the ward and stake level where policy is most often implemented, are much more likely to treat it as requirement than guide and extremely reluctant to countermand it. This is particularly so regarding issues involving sexuality and especially so regarding homosexuality.

It seems disingenuous for Otterson to explain that it was intentional that the changes were simply

announced with “no additional information or context on the usual Church websites.” Did he and others really imagine that such a radical change would not need such information and context? While Otterson is correct in stating, “No handbook can answer every question or address every circumstance,” surely a document that raises as many questions as this one demands more explanation. If, as Otterson states, “In particular, Church leaders are concerned for children [presumably of gay parents]—whether biologically born to one of the partners, adopted or medically conceived,” then making such a bald, draconian change, one that couldn’t help but disturb and offend such children and their parents, seems a strange way to manifest such concern.

Otterson is also misleading when he states, “The vast majority of Church members understand that there has been no doctrinal change with regard to LGBT issues.” In truth, the “vast majority” of Latter-day Saints understand very little about homosexuality and, if anything, are more likely to be confused over the range of policies and teachings on the subject over the past half century. For much of that time homosexuality was considered, in the words of one modern prophet “The abominable and detestable crime against nature.” Also, for much of that time and until very recently, the standard Church teaching was that homosexuality was chosen and changeable, a teaching whose damage, given the number of gay and lesbian Mormon suicides, is impossible to calculate.

It was because of the powerful negative impact of such teaching that so many LDS gays and their families and allies rejoiced over the positive, accepting messages found on the Church’s official website, “Mormons and Gays.org,” including the following: “This official site . . . reflect[s] the feelings of Church leaders as to how we should treat each other as part of the human family. The site offers a place where the people whose lives are impacted by the attraction to the same sex can find inspiration to work through difficult challenges while remaining faithful to Church teachings.” Another positive statement that is difficult to square with the recent announcement is the following: “We recognize in each other our common needs for intimacy and companionship and can discuss them without shame or rejection.” It is safe to say that much of the rejoicing over the loving message on that site has been dampened and dispelled by the newly-announced changes for LDS gay parents and their children.

Whether the new changes to the Handbook are to be considered policy or doctrine is essentially academic to the majority of Latter-day Saint same-sex parents and their children. However these changes were meant to be taken, from what I have gathered, most gays and lesbian parents and their families see them as, at best, unenlightened and, at worst, destructive to the fabric of their families and their faith. The new instructions to leaders have engendered great fear in many such families that the policy will drive a wedge among members of extended families, between gay parents and their children and between families and the Church. But it isn’t just same-sex parents and their children who are challenged by the change; many of us who consider ourselves allies of these saints are deeply troubled by what they seem to portend.

How to Respond?

“As a church, nobody should be more loving and compassionate. Let us be at the forefront in terms of expressing love, compassion and outreach. Let us not have families exclude or be disrespectful of those who choose a different lifestyle as a result of their feelings about their own gender.”

—Elder Quentin L. Cook (Mormonsandgays.org)

There are many ways to respond to a crisis like the one the Church seems to be suffering over this policy change—and I think “crisis” not too strong a word. According to news reports and anecdotal evidence, a number of saints have removed their names from the records of the Church. Many others are likely to leave more quietly. As I have thought about how I could best respond, it has helped me to consider this policy change in the context of my long life in the Church. Fifty years ago I was disturbed by the Church’s teaching on blacks and the priesthood and, after much study and prayerful thought, concluded that it was not only uninspired but seriously misguided. I didn’t leave the Church over the issue but rather stayed and worked for change, championing the rights not only of blacks but of all minorities. Also during this time, I found myself out of harmony with the support of the majority of my fellow saints, including most leaders, for the war in Vietnam. While I found that war morally indefensible, my sentiments did not cause me to leave the Church, but rather to stay and work for peace. When the Church openly opposed the ERA, I was in sympathy with those of my sister saints who felt marginalized and even demonized by official and unofficial statements about women, I felt the best response was to stay and work for women’s rights, which I have done. When it was clear, beginning in graduate school, that my political sympathies were not in accord with those of most North American saints, I didn’t leave to join a religious tradition more compatible with my liberal, progressive views, but rather have stayed and found fellowship with my more conservative brothers and sisters. When I saw the destructive effects of the Church’s teachings on homosexuality, I determined to use my voice to affect change in attitude, behavior and practice so that my gay and lesbian brothers and sisters would be treated with greater understanding, respect and compassion. When the Church vigorously worked for the passage of Proposition 8 in California in 2008, I felt in conscience that I could not support those efforts and used my voice and pen to explain why I chose to stay and work for equal rights for gays who wanted their relationships legitimized.

I have friends and some family members who have left the Church over these and similar issues. I am aware that I might have left the Church at various junctures over the last half century, but if I had, not only would I have been deprived of the opportunity to work for change in the Church but, more important, I would have been deprived of the many great blessings that flow from being an active, committed Latter-day Saint. These include the blessings of ministering as a bishop to a congregation of single Latter-day Saints; six years of full-time missionary service, including serving in a mission presidency; many opportunities to teach Christ’s gospel in formal and informal settings; opportunities to teach Mormonism at the university level; opportunities to present the goodness of Mormonism to the world; the opportunity of ministering to the Church’s malnourished children in the developing world through the work of the Liahona Children’s Foundation; and countless other opportunities to serve and be served by others through the Church’s many programs. These experiences have had an expanding, refining influence on my life.

Another reason I have stayed instead of leaving is the great influence the Church has had on my personal life as a husband, father, grandfather, friend and citizen. In truth, the gospel and the Church rescued me from a family culture that predicted almost certain unhappiness and even misery. I have been a close witness of the cost of not living the gospel for, unlike most members of my immediate and even extended family, I escaped alcoholism, divorce, and the consequences of serious transgression. Because of that, I have wanted my children and grandchildren to enjoy the blessings of the gospel and the Church. Had I chosen to leave the Church it is doubtful that I would have been blessed with the rich, fulfilling life I have had. More than this, I am convinced that had I left the Church over any one of these or any other issue, I would not have had the opportunity Mormonism has afforded me of becoming a better, more devoted follower of Jesus Christ. My life

has been dramatically transformed by him, including by the powerful messages about his life and ministry found in the Book of Mormon and the witness of modern prophets and disciples. Christ has called me to stay, to love the Church in spite of its brokenness in the same way that he stays with and loves me in spite of my brokenness.

Four years ago, I edited a volume titled, *Why I Stay: The Challenges of Discipleship for Contemporary Mormons* (Signature Books, 2011). As I near completion of the second volume of *Why I Stay* and as I enter my eighth decade, I have thought even more deeply about why I remain an active, committed Latter-day Saint. In my Introduction to the first volume I wrote, "For those who stay there is an inevitable sadness over those who leave. This sadness is compounded when the reasons for leaving are unchristian-like treatment by Church leaders or members or when the rupture was preventable by greater compassion and charity," as I feel it certainly was in regard to the new policy.

One of the reasons I stay is because I believe something radical happened in the world when a fourteen-year old American farm boy walked out of the woods bathed in the glory of a heavenly vision, when by some miraculous power he translated a new witness for Christ from ancient American peoples, and when a series of paradigm-shattering revelations about the nature of God and humans was unfolded through what we call the Restoration. I want to continue being a part of what began in that sacred grove. The Church's new policies on gay and lesbian parents and their children do not invalidate those truths.

Mormonism is my home; it is my faith; it is my family. I stay not only for those who stay but for those who have left or who feel like leaving. I stay for those who may choose Mormonism in the future. But I also stay for all of those beyond Mormonism, for those of other faiths and those of no faith, because I hope my faith and devotion may make some small difference in a world in which light and truth are always contending with darkness and error and in which there is always a need for more love. I choose to respond with love. It is both the least and the most that I can do.

Coda and an Image

"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long."—Psalm 32:3

"I have groaned by reason of the turmoil of my heart."—Psalm 38:8

"The only whole heart is a broken one."

—Rabbi David Wolpe

I conclude not with words but an image. Last spring as I walked through the BYU art gallery, a print arrested my attention—Franz Schwartz's "The Agony in the Garden." It now hangs in my home. As I look at it each day, I am struck by both the deep sorrow enveloping Christ and the tender compassion and consolation of the angel who comforts him with loving arms and sheltering wings. Even though I am not yet such an angel, I want to be. As I look at this painting, I try to see everyone as Christ—including my fellow saints, those who have left and those who stay (some of whom I imagine may not be happy with what I have written here), and, at this difficult time for the Church, the apostles and prophets who, though at times may make mistakes, I am convinced labor with love to lead us. Especially at this troubling time, I see my gay and lesbian brothers and sisters and their children and I want to encircle them with love as this angel encircles Christ. As Francisco Goldman says, "The great metaphor at the heart of the Gospel According to Saint Matthew is that those who suffer and those who show love for those who suffer are joined through suffering and grace to

Jesus Christ." That is my hope and my prayer.



¹ Ted Walsh, "Elder Christofferson Explains Updated LDS Church Policies on Same-sex Marriage and Children,"

² It is possible that I am misrepresenting Elder Christofferson. Seeing a draft of this paper, a friend wrote, "I don't think Christofferson indicated concern about protecting children from their parents. Rather, I think Christofferson was seeking to make sure they stayed away from Church and the potential ostracization they would receive from other Mormons." While I admit such a possibility, it doesn't seem probable, especially given Elder Christofferson's clear record of compassion for families with LGBT children.

³ While Church leaders have been explicit and consistent about how they regard same-sex relationships and marriages, such relationships and marriages have not to this point required mandatory disciplinary hearings. For various categories of transgression, under the category "Excommunication," the General Handbook states that disciplinary councils are mandatory for murder, incest, child abuse and apostasy. It adds, "As directed by the Spirit, [excommunication] may be necessary for:

1. Members who have committed serious transgressions, especially violations of temple covenants .

...

2. Members who have been disfellowshipped and have not repented and for whom excommunication seems to offer the best hope for reformation.

3. Members whose conduct makes them a serious threat to others and whose Church membership facilitates their access to victims.

4. Church leaders or prominent members whose transgressions significantly impair the good name or moral influence of the Church in the community that is aware of the transgression. (emphasis added)

⁴ Under "Apostasy," the General Handbook states: "As used here, apostasy refers to members who:

1. Repeatedly act in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the Church or its leaders.

2. Persist in teaching as Church doctrine information that is not Church doctrine after they have been corrected by their bishops or higher authority.

3. Continue to follow the teachings of apostate sects (such as those that advocate plural marriage)

after being corrected by their bishop or higher authority. In such cases, excommunication may be necessary if repentance is not evident after counseling and encouragement.

5 Ibid.

6 The General Handbook specifies that such transgression "includes (but is not limited to) attempted murder, rape, forcible sexual abuse, spouse abuse, intentional serious physical injury of others, adultery, fornication, homosexual relations, deliberate abandonment of family responsibilities, robbery, burglary, theft, embezzlement, sale of illegal drugs, fraud, perjury, and false swearing."

7 Again, a friend takes a darker view here: "The Church would not agree that it considers such children 'less worthy' than children of straight, inactive, disobedient parents. They would just say they are protecting such children from the cognitive dissonance that would result from their attending a church that considers their parents apostates." This suggests that the Church would prefer such children to stay away from Church, which runs counter to the Savior's teaching that children should not be forbidden from coming to him—and, one would presume, his Church. However the Church considers such children, delaying their baptism would seem to guarantee a negative result for them. Certainly it would seem to decrease the chances of them joining the church later and to increase the chances that they would be subject to discriminatory behavior.

8 "First Presidency Clarifies General Handbook Instructions,"

9 From Handbook 2: Families and the Church in God's plan

10 The salvation of little children

11 Christian Wiman, "My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer" (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux) 2013, 7.

12 "Race and the Priesthood,"

13 Spencer W. Kimball, "A Counselling Problem in the Church"; The Miracle of Forgiveness, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), Chapter Six, "The Crime Against Nature." For a comprehensive view of homosexuality among the Mormons, see Connell O'Donovan, "The Abominable and Detestable Crime Against Nature," : www.connellodonovan.com/abom.html#BM95A Revised History of Homosexuality & Mormonism, 1840-1980.

14 "Love One Another: A Discussion on Sam-Sex Attraction,"

15 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011), ix.

16 "Introduction" to The Gospel According to Matthew, Pocket Canon Bible (New York: Grove Press, 1999), xv.