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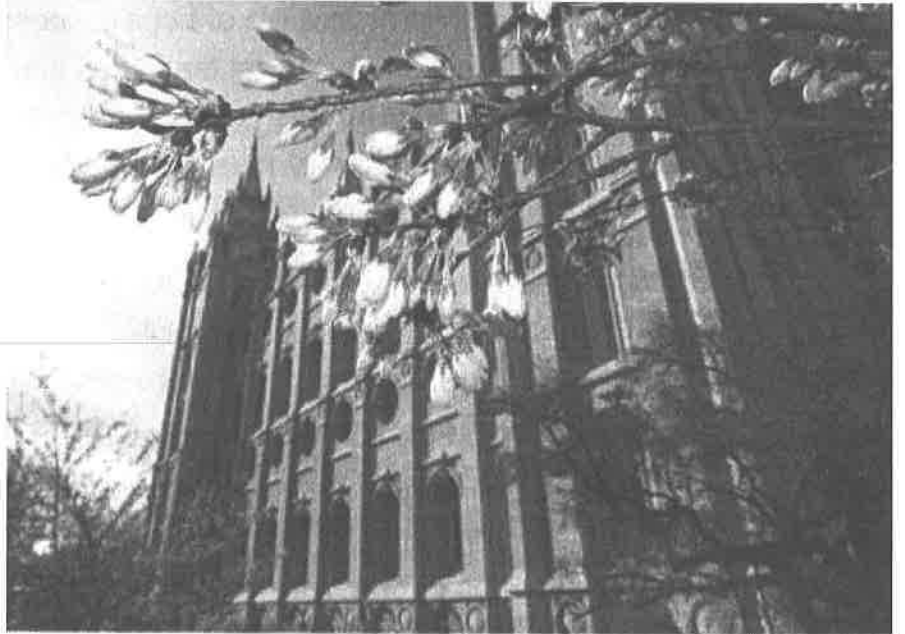
Op-ed: Mormon church must do more for LGBT youths before more take their own lives

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We have seen a tremendous tragedy here in the state of Utah. Four bright young people, three of them teenagers, have died by suicide. All are known to have intersected both the LDS and the LGBT communities. These were shining lights with potential to illuminate the universe. They have been snubbed and silenced. More families will struggle for the rest of their lives asking what more could they have done. An entire support community will rally around them and ask, "What can we do?" The dear friends who knew and loved them will be forced to ask difficult questions.



(Al Hartmann | Tribune File Photo) Flowering trees are opening their blossoms just in time for Spring Conference on Temple Square. March 31, 1998.

The time for talk is over. The time for action is here. Individuals will react in various ways, but hopefully their reactions will result in awareness, visibility, outreach, community-building and unconditional love for their queer children and extended LGBTQIA community.

I condemn in the strongest possible language the environment and culture that is leading to self-loathing, self-hate guilt and shame. The culture that these children are saturated in has led tragically to more than just the suicides this week. The history of Utah and the legacy of the LDS Church is splattered with the blood of dead queer youth and adult members.

I have reached out to my ward bishop twice in the past two days. My repeated pleas to find out what my ward and stake in Riverton are doing are met with predictable testimony bearing of the Plan of Salvation and an incredible vacuum of silence. Small, cautious steps on the local level

are being taken. At least one stake in Lehi is taking an incredibly proactive role in educating their congregations, an effort led by the stake president and bishops. Information is being shared with them through an incredible woman who is a silent force from the membership of the Mama Dragons. The absence of a church-wide program of outreach and education is reprehensible.

I personally know three incredible women, each a Mama Dragon, who have lost sons to death by suicide. Each is tragic. Each is preventable. All are surrounded by a culture of intolerance and exclusion from the LDS Church. Platitudes, lip-service and meaningless testimony sharing by the highest levels of LDS Church leadership must stop. Announcing a hollow love for all yet condemning these beautiful children to a life of hopelessness and pain must end now. Both are done in the same breath. Renouncing all past teachings that do not align with current medical and mental health standards and practices needs to happen immediately. Resources that have not been devoted to the queer community must be released. Materials to reach out and extend a hand of love and inclusion must be created.

We have seen honorable and real outreach to other communities that are marginalized here in Utah and around the world. It is time to look inwardly honestly and without fear. The corporation that has created an environment where individuals seek the comfort of death over the sting of life needs to change. Attitudes of love and acceptance must replace bigotry, hate and a false persecution complex. Hearts of parents, congregations and leaders need be touched. Attitudes must be changed and lives must be saved.

Anything less is an admission of guilt.

Kimberly Anderson is the editor of the Mama Dragon Story Project.

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