



The LDS Church released changes to its Handbook on November 5, 2015 in relation to same-sex couples and children raised by same-sex couples. Specifically, the Church now prohibits children of same-sex couples from being baptized until they are 18 - and only if they move out of their parents' homes, disavow all same-sex relationships, and receive approval from the First Presidency. Likewise, the new policies apply to priesthood ordination and full-time missionary service, and even prohibit children of same-sex couples from receiving a Church-sanctioned "name and a blessing."

Moreover, the Church specifically designates Mormons in same-sex marriages as apostates who must undergo disciplinary hearings that will likely result in excommunication.

In adopting these policies, the Church not only doubled down on its stance against homosexuality but also hardened its doctrinal boundaries at a time when an increasing number of Mormons are expressing support for the LGBT community.

In adopting these new policies, the Church is likely trying to stave off future advocacy in that children of same-sex couples will undoubtedly push for more inclusion and acceptance of homosexuals as they grow into adulthood. But instead this policy appears to be targeting the most helpless, most sympathetic, and most innocent by excluding children from "essential ordinances" solely on the basis of their parents' actions. In short, these policies appear to directly conflict with the second article of faith.

What is particularly dumbfounding is the bogus justifications proffered by both LDS leadership and many members in support of the policies. Consider the following:

Protecting Families

Many members on social media claim that the new policy prohibiting children of same-sex relationships from being baptized has been instituted to "protect families." This seems dubious when the church does not recognize same-sex families as legitimate families. Elder L. Tom Perry, during April 2015 Conference, labeled same-sex marriages as "counterfeit." Regardless, preventing children from participating in Church ordinances when they are already attending church with the approval of both parents serves to tell them they are second-class citizens. Moreover, the fact that the policy requires children to disavow their parents' relationship and move out of the house in order to get baptized indicates that the LDS church has no interest in protecting non-traditional families.

Preventing Family Tension

Apostle [D. Todd Christofferson](#) recently stated that the new policy is meant to protect children and prevent tension that may arise between children and their parents. This explanation would be more credible if the Church applied this same logic in other situations. But it does not, and the Church

does not convey similar concern about the tension that may arise from many of its other policies. Children of non-member families are routinely taught doctrines at Church without regard to how the information might be received at home. Children with parents living outside of wedlock and children of smokers, drinkers, adulterers, liars, fornicators, etc. attend church and are baptized on a regular basis without regard to the familial tension that may result. In fact, the Church regularly baptizes children even when one of the parents vehemently opposes the decision.

What the Church fails to realize is that its new policy exacerbates family tension. I have a friend who is currently in a same-sex relationship. When he was an active member, my friend served an honorable mission, magnified his many church callings, and left an indelible impression among those he served. Several years ago, my friend came out as gay and he and his wife got divorced. They now share custody of their four children.

My friend, who is still supportive of the church and often attends with his children, recently emailed me and said he feels as if he has been “punched in the gut.” He said his son is scheduled to be baptized in one month and now everything is in limbo. He is afraid that his ex-wife will now petition for full custody and try and eliminate him from the family dynamic. He said his children, due in large part to what they are taught at church, already view him as a “second-class parents.” He stated that this new policy will only cause more division and more tension within his family.

The Church’s new policy has heartbreaking consequences and further alienates the LGBT community from the love and acceptance central to Christ’s ministry.

Similar to Children of Polygamists Relationships

Elder Christofferson recently pointed out that the Church’s policy regarding children of same-sex couples mirrors its policy toward children of polygamist families. Although children of polygamist families are not required to wait until they are 18 to be baptized, Elder Christofferson’s statement is mostly accurate. And it’s ironic, as polygamist families are living in accordance with previous church teachings and as sanctioned in D&C 132. Regardless, [Lindsay Hansen Park](#) pointed out the flawed logic in comparing the children of same-sex parents to children of polygamists. She stated, in essence, that just because the Church is treating one subset of people poorly does not justify treating another subset of people poorly.

Furthermore, the Church fails to explain why children of same-sex parents must be treated differently than the children of other parents engaging in conduct contrary to LDS teachings. The policy excluding children of same-sex couples from getting baptized is particularly bizarre when you consider that children of rapists, murderers, adulterers, etc. are still welcomed into the church. It makes you wonder what the church really thinks about the LGBT community.

Children Lack Sufficient Maturity

Elder Christofferson suggested that children of same-sex couples that are under 18 are not sufficiently mature to make a “conscious decision” as it relates to baptism. If that is the case, how can the Church claim that eight-year-olds are sufficiently mature to understand the commitment they are making when getting baptized? How can the Church claim that 18-year-olds are sufficiently mature to receive their endowment and make life-long covenants in the temple? Moreover, why do children of traditional LDS families need essential saving ordinances such as baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost at age eight, yet children of same-sex couples can wait until they are 18?

Furthermore, Joseph Smith, at age 37, married a 14-year-old girl, Helen Mar Kimball. In proposing to Helen, Joseph Smith stated that he was commanded by God to marry her and that her salvation and the salvation of her family depended on it. Granted, Helen was legally old enough to marry (even though it was illegal to enter into a polygamist marriage), and some debatably argue that marriage at such a young age was culturally acceptable. Nonetheless, how can the Church claim that a

14-year-old girl was mature enough to enter into an “eternal marriage” with Joseph Smith yet, on the other hand, claim that a 17-year-old child of same-sex parents is not capable to deciding whether to be baptized.

Bizarrely, Elder Christofferson’s logic is discriminatorily applied to children of same-sex couples but disregarded for everyone else.

Drawing a Line in the Sand

As previously noted, the Church’s new handbook specifically designates Mormons in same-sex marriages as apostates who must undergo disciplinary hearings that will likely result in excommunication. Elder Christofferson suggested that this policy was necessary to, in essence, draw a line in the sand and demonstrate the serious nature of homosexual relationships. This is a particularly baffling stance when compared to Church policies related to other acts of misconduct. The new handbook states that leaders have **discretion** to initiate discipline against those who have engaged in “attempted murder, forcible rape, sexual abuse, spouse abuse, intentional physical injury of others, adultery, fornication, homosexual relations (especially sexual cohabitation), deliberate abandonment of family responsibilities....” but **must** convene a disciplinary council against those who are “in a same-gender marriage.” What doctrinal, scriptural, moral, or legal justification suggests that those in a same-gender marriage are not only on par but somehow worse than rapists and attempted murderers?

Trust God’s Plan

Many members, while expressing shock and surprise to the new policies, shrug off the issue by stating the new policies reflect God’s plan and we should simply follow the prophet. As a preliminary matter, it is unclear whether Church leaders are claiming that the new policies are the product of divine revelation. Regardless, what many members fail to consider is that prophets have repeatedly taught doctrines and implemented practices that were later disavowed as false.

Brigham Young taught a doctrine now known as the “Adam-God theory” over the pulpit at the 1852 and 1854 General Conferences, and even introduced this doctrine at the [Lecture at the Veil](#) in the Temple endowment ceremony. (Journal of [L. John Nuttall](#), personal secretary of Brigham Young, February 7, 1877 in BYU Special Collections). Brigham Young also taught a doctrine known as “[Blood Atonement](#),” indicating that murder is so heinous that Christ’s atonement does not apply to murders. Thus, to atone for murder, the perpetrator must have his or her blood shed as a sacrificial offering. (Brigham Young, [Journal of Discourses, Vol. 4, p. 53-54](#)) Likewise, for close to 130 years, those of African descent were banned from holding the priesthood, and black men and women were prohibited from participating in temple endowment or sealing ordinances.

Simply stated, the Church doesn’t have a great track record on social issues. What compels so many members to follow, support, and defend a policy that has so little justification; fails to productively advance the Church’s interests; portrays the Church as hateful and intolerant; and simply feels wrong?

Recommendations, Questions, and Conclusions

The Church can easily protect its own interests without taking such a heavy-handed and discriminatory approach towards the LGBT community. Here are several suggestions:

First, the church can maintain its stance against gay marriage without designating its participants as apostates. As a preliminary matter, the church rarely disciplines inactive couples who are living together out of wedlock, especially when these individuals have children attending church. Rather, formal discipline is typically initiated only when the member subject to discipline conveys a desire to change and repent.

The church could easily implement the same stance for same-sex couples. Rather than labeling homosexuals apostates and initiating discipline, why not simply allow and invite them to attend church

and only move forward with discipline if the member conveys an intent to “change” and “repent.” After all, the church has been very clear that sex outside of marriage and homosexual conduct is sinful. Why is it necessary to also label homosexuals who are legally married “apostates” and move to excommunicate them?

Second, the church should allow ALL children to receive a baby blessing regardless of whether they are children of members of non-members. Why should perfect, innocent children be denied a blessing simply because their parents are gay?

Third, the church should allow all willing children to be baptized so long as they have parental consent. After all, children of parents who are living out of wedlock can be baptized. Why can't the same policy apply to children of homosexuals?

As a final note, Church members should take Shel Silverstein's words to heart in considering the new policies. Rather than instinctively deferring to Church leaders for explanation and justification, perhaps more members should ask themselves how they really feel about the Church's treatment of the LGBT community.

There is a voice inside of you
That whispers all day long,
“I feel that this is right for me,
I know that *this* is wrong.”
No teacher, preacher, parent, friend
Or wise man can decide
What's right for you — just listen to
The voice that speaks inside.