

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
OFFICE OF THE FIRST PRESIDENCY
47 EAST SOUTH TEMPLE STREET, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH 84150-1200

June 29, 2015

To: General Authorities; General Auxiliary Presidencies; and the following leaders in the United States and Canada: Area Seventies; Temple, Stake, Mission and District Presidencies; Bishops and Branch Presidents

Dear Brethren and Sisters:

Enclosed is a statement by the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve in response to the recent Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage in the United States. The statement also pertains to the situation in Canada. Local leaders are asked to meet with all adults, young men, and young women on either July 5 or July 12 in a setting other than sacrament meeting and read to them the entire statement.

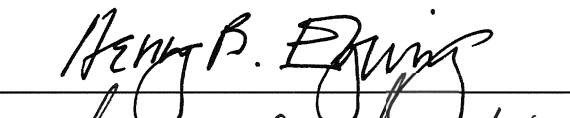
Also included is background material which may be helpful in answering questions that arise.

Stake presidents are asked to see that bishops receive copies of this letter and the enclosures.

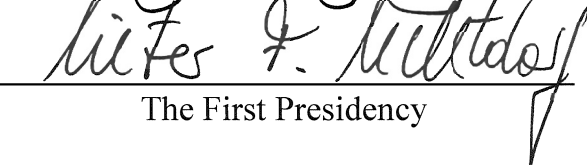
Sincerely yours,



Thomas S. Monson



Henry B. Eyring



Dieter F. Uchtdorf
The First Presidency

This letter, with enclosure, is being translated and will be distributed to units identified as French and Spanish in the United States and Canada. Distribution in these languages will be complete within two weeks. If leaders need this letter in languages not listed above, they may contact the member of the Presidency of the Seventy who supervises the area. Area leaders can forward requests to Church headquarters (1-801-240-2933). 13782

RESPONSE TO THE SUPREME COURT DECISION LEGALIZING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN THE UNITED STATES

June 29, 2015

Because of the recent decision of the United States Supreme Court and similar legal proceedings and legislative actions in a number of countries that have given civil recognition to same-sex marriage relationships, the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints restates and reaffirms the doctrinal foundation of Church teachings on morality, marriage, and the family. As we do, we encourage all to consider these teachings in the context of the Plan of Salvation and our Heavenly Father's purposes in creating the earth and providing for our mortal birth and experience here as His children.

Marriage between a man and a woman was instituted by God and is central to His plan for His children and for the well-being of society. "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:27-28). "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Strong families, guided by a loving mother and father, serve as the fundamental institution for nurturing children, instilling faith, and transmitting to future generations the moral strengths and values that are important to civilization and vital to eternal salvation.

A family built on marriage of a man and a woman is the best setting for God's plan of happiness to thrive. That is why communities and nations generally have encouraged and protected marriage between a man and a woman, and the family that

results from their union, as privileged institutions. Sexual relations outside of such a marriage are contrary to the laws of God pertaining to morality.

Changes in the civil law do not, indeed cannot, change the moral law that God has established. God expects us to uphold and keep His commandments regardless of divergent opinions or trends in society. His law of chastity is clear: sexual relations are proper only between a man and a woman who are legally and lawfully wedded as husband and wife. We invite all to review and understand the doctrine contained in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.”

Consistent with our fundamental beliefs, Church officers will not employ their ecclesiastical authority to perform marriages between two people of the same sex, and the Church does not permit its meetinghouses or other properties to be used for ceremonies, receptions, or other activities associated with same-sex marriages. Nevertheless, all visitors are welcome to our chapels and premises so long as they respect our standards of conduct while there.

The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us to love and treat all people with kindness and civility—even when we disagree. We affirm that those who avail themselves of laws or court rulings authorizing same-sex marriage should not be treated disrespectfully. Indeed, the Church has advocated for rights of same-sex couples in matters of hospitalization and medical care, fair housing and employment, and probate, so long as these do not infringe on the integrity of the traditional family or the constitutional rights of churches.

The Church insists on its leaders’ and members’ right to express and advocate religious convictions on marriage, family, and morality free from retaliation or

retribution. The Church is also entitled to maintain its standards of moral conduct and good standing for members.

As members of the Church, we are responsible to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to illuminate the great blessings that flow from heeding God's commandments as well as the inevitable consequences of ignoring them. We invite all to pray that people everywhere will have their hearts softened to the truths God established in the beginning, and that wisdom will be granted to those who are called upon to decide issues critical to society's future.

THE COUNCIL OF
THE FIRST PRESIDENCY AND
QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES
OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Background Material for Bishops and Branch Presidents
On the U.S. Supreme Court Decision on Same-sex Marriage

The Church has provided a statement dated June 29, 2015, prepared by the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles regarding the U.S. Supreme Court's decision legalizing same-sex marriage in the United States. The response reaffirms the divinely-revealed reasons and proper doctrinal context for the Church's unequivocal position regarding matters of morality, chastity, marriage, and the family. As the response notes, the Church's teachings on these subjects are grounded in the scriptural declarations of God's eternal plan for the salvation and exaltation of His children and are framed in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." While the statement stands on its own, below is additional information that may be helpful to you in responding to questions that may arise.

For much of human history, civil laws have generally been compatible with God's laws. Unfortunately, there have been notable exceptions to that pattern. For example, it is legal in the United States to perform an abortion on an unborn fetus. However, this practice is not morally acceptable before God. (See *Handbook 1*, 17.3). The consumption of alcohol, while contrary to God's law, is legal in most nations of the world, but the physical and social toll for doing so is a painful matter of record.

So, too, with issues of unchaste sexual behavior, whether it be heterosexual or homosexual in its orientation. As the First Presidency has previously said and as this current response affirms, "Changes in the civil law do not, indeed cannot, change the moral law that God has established. God expects us to uphold and keep His commandments regardless of divergent opinions or trends in society" (First Presidency letter on "Same-Sex Marriage," January 9, 2014).

What is the Church's Policy on Homosexual Relations?

"Homosexual behavior violates the commandments of God, is contrary to the purposes of human sexuality, and deprives people of the blessings that can be found in family life and in the saving ordinances of the gospel. Those who persist in such behavior or who influence others to do so are subject to Church discipline. Homosexual behavior can be forgiven through sincere repentance.

"If members engage in homosexual behavior, Church leaders should help them have a clear understanding of faith in Jesus Christ, the process of repentance, and the purpose of life on earth.

"While opposing homosexual behavior, the Church reaches out with understanding and respect to individuals who are attracted to those of the same gender.

"If members feel same-gender attraction but do not engage in any homosexual behavior, leaders should support and encourage them in their resolve to live the law of chastity and to control unrighteous thoughts. These members may receive Church callings. If they are worthy and qualified in every other way, they may also hold temple recommends and receive temple ordinances" (*Handbook 2*, 21.4.6).

Does the authorization of same-sex marriage affect my right to religious freedom?

Our individual right to religious freedom is protected by the First Amendment to the United States' Constitution and by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As we exercise that right, we must also exercise tolerance and respect toward others' rights but do so without condoning behavior that goes contrary to the laws of God. "While we strive for the virtue of tolerance, other commendable qualities need not be lost. Tolerance does not require the surrender of noble purpose or of individual identity. The Lord gave instruction to leaders of His restored Church to establish and maintain institutional integrity—'that the Church may stand independent' (D&C 78:14)" (Elder Russell M. Nelson, "Teach Us Tolerance and Love," April 1994 general conference).

How do I respond respectfully to those who consider the Church's position on this matter unchristian?

Our objection to same-sex marriage is not based on animosity toward anyone, but on our understanding of God's purposes for His children. For us, the issues are not simply "tolerance" and "equality." The issues are the nature of marriage and the consequences of redefining a divinely established institution. In addition, redefining marriage in the law can have profound consequences for society, particularly for children. Mothers and fathers matter, and they are not interchangeable. "On the subject of public discourse, we should all follow the gospel

teachings to love our neighbor and avoid contention. Followers of Christ should be examples of civility. We should . . . be good listeners and show concern for the sincere belief [of others.] Though we may disagree, we should not be disagreeable. We should be wise in explaining our position and, in doing so, ask that others not be offended by our sincere religious beliefs and the free exercise of our religion” (Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Loving Others and Living with Differences,” October 2014 general conference).

What if I have reservations of my own regarding the Church’s position on this subject?

“Members who . . . have doctrinal questions should make a diligent effort, including earnest prayer and scripture study, to find solutions and answers themselves. Church members are encouraged to seek guidance from the Holy Ghost to help them in their personal lives and in family and Church responsibilities.

“If members still need help, they should counsel first with their bishop. If necessary, he may refer them to the stake president.

“. . . Stake presidents who need clarification about doctrinal or other Church matters may write in behalf of their members to the First Presidency” (*Handbook 2*, 21.1.24).