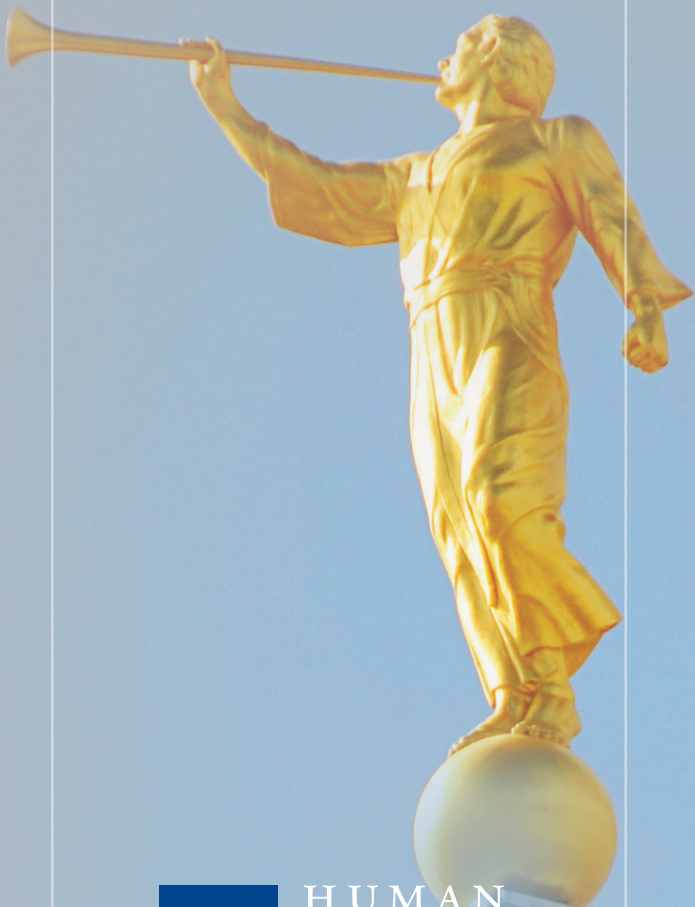


COMING HOME TO MORMONISM AND TO SELF



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN
FOUNDATIONTM

Welcome



Dear Friends,

All across this country and around the world, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people are having important conversations about the role of faith in our lives. I'm proud of the contribution this document makes to that conversation, particularly as it relates to the Mormon community. I especially want to thank the advisory team of Mormon scholars and activists who helped shape and hone this work. Their expertise made its

wisdom and inclusive message possible.

Today, LGBTQ people are part of our country's diverse faith communities. Within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), many LGBTQ people and our friends, families, and allies seeking to create a safe and welcoming place to practice their religion.

There remains much work left to do, but this guide speaks to the real challenges facing those working to live openly and fully, as their true and complete selves.

Wherever you are on this journey, we hope this resource helps you on your way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chad Griffin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chad Griffin

President, Human Rights Campaign

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A Special Note: This publication is primarily intended to serve as a general guide for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) Mormon who wish to enrich their faith.



Introduction

It wasn't until the 1960s that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) articulated official policies and positions on gay and lesbian identity and relationships. Like most denominations at that time, it viewed homosexuality as a conscious choice and a "grievous sin." Since then, church policies – which now address transgender people as well – generally characterize same-sex sexual behavior as a transgression punishable by excommunication. Most recently, same-sex marriage was labeled as apostasy, and the children of same-sex couples were denied membership in the church.

However, many faithful Mormon LGBTQ individuals and their families and friends experience a profound disconnect between these policies and their personal experience and beliefs. Many LGBTQ faithful live in the knowledge that they are beloved children of God, despite policies that stigmatize them and their families. Others accept church teachings and strive to make their personal journey fit the paths prescribed by doctrine.

At the same time, the LGBTQ faithful are often misunderstood by the larger LGBTQ community, which struggles to recognize the benefits of remaining in an unwelcoming church. This short booklet delves into the complexities of this very issue, seeking clarity on church policies that exclude LGBTQ members and their families. Included are many personal stories from the LGBTQ faithful and, in particular, from parents who have watched their LGBTQ children struggle with church teachings. At the end of the booklet there is a comprehensive list of resources for further exploration and support.



Celebrate – Not Tolerate

Mormon Parents of LGBTQ Children

Some of the strongest voices for LGBTQ inclusion in the Mormon church are the parents of LGBTQ children. As Wendy Montgomery explained, “You don’t tolerate a human being, you tolerate a backache. And ‘acceptance’ is too weak a word. I don’t accept my gay son, I *celebrate* him.”

A devout Mormon, Montgomery answered the church’s call in 2008 to advocate for Proposition 8, which made same-sex marriage illegal in California. It never occurred to her that one of her own children might be gay. The first hint was a radical change in her son Jordan’s behavior. “The light in him just went off,” she explains of her teenage son. “He stopped smiling. My ‘A’ student became an ‘F’ student who spent all day in his room.”

Deeply concerned, Montgomery found and read her son’s journal. It included entries that described a romantic crush on a boy at school. A later entry expressed deep fear at the realization of what those feelings meant.

Montgomery and her husband Tom gave themselves two weeks to research LGBTQ issues, starting with church doctrine. When those teachings appeared incompatible with first-hand knowledge of their son’s kind and generous spirit,



they expanded their research to gain a broader picture of the situation. Then they acted.

"In the Mormon church, dads can give children a priesthood blessing," she explains. "We waited until the other kids were out of the house, and we called Jordan into our room. And his father gave him a blessing that said 'God loves you exactly the way you are and God will accept you just as you are.' And he added, 'Your parents love you exactly as you are too.'"

Only in the wake of that blessing, with the unconditional love of God and family made crystal clear, did the Montgomerys raise the issue of Jordan's sexuality.

"I was hugging him," Wendy Montgomery remembers. "And his father was sitting across from us and he said, 'I have to ask you something. Are you struggling with feelings of homosexuality?' Jordan started to tremble and cry, and I could feel him nod his head against my shoulder. We just held him close."

Today, Jordan and his father have chosen to "take a break from the church" but Wendy remains deeply involved as an advocate for LGBTQ Mormons and their parents. "There's definitely a lot of conflict," she admits. "There's conflict with other Mormons who know we are trying to make the church do something it is not ready to do. I choose to stay in that conflict because it's my church and I love it. And I stay to be a resource for those parents, and so those kids know they have a friend sitting there in the pews."

Bryce Cook, the devout father of two gay sons, described the difficult path from casual acceptance of church teachings to an understanding of the church's missteps – and his own personal failings. "Trevor's revelation rocked our world," he says of his older son. "I realized that everything I had believed about being gay wasn't true, and the journey began."

He credits his sons with his own personal transformation. "I shudder to think who I'd be if I had continued on the way I was going," he says. "I hope that given my faith and maturity and wisdom of years I would have realized that the way I used to think was not God's way – even if I had not had gay kids. But the reality is I did have gay kids and that changed my heart."

Like many people interviewed for this guide, Cook speaks with great reverence of Christ and of his teachings. “Jesus taught a lot of hard things,” he says. “He pointed things out to the religious people of the day that did not go down smoothly, that questioned their core beliefs. He healed on the Sabbath; he associated with people you’re not supposed to associate with. He broke the mold. In the same way, I knew that I had to start doing that. I had to break out of what I had thought was true about gay people.”

Given the choice, Cook wouldn’t change the rocky path he and his family have walked. “It was freeing, liberating, absolutely,” he says. “Every parent I talk to who has a gay child – a gay child who’s in a healthy place – they express the same thing. We wouldn’t change it. It has made our lives more enriched, our hearts bigger, our love deeper. We are better Christians, better people.”



ARE YOUR PARENTS STRUGGLING WITH YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION?

Here are 2 suggested resources for LDS parents of LGBTQ children:

- 1 *Mama Dragons***
Promotes healthy, loving, and supportive environments for mothers of LGBTQIA children.
www.mamadragons.org
- 2 *I’ll Walk With You***
Videos of parents of LGBTQ children giving a message of comfort and support to other parents who are struggling.
www.ldswalkwithyou.org



Pushed to the Margins

LDS Doctrinal Positions

Central to LDS policies on LGBTQ issues is the position that sex outside of marriage goes against the will of God, and that marriage can only exist between a man and a woman. The result is that sexually active same-sex couples are perceived as behaving contrary to God's will. Good standing in the church is, thus, only possible through abstinence. While all are welcome at local Sunday services, church membership and a temple recommend, which allows temple access, are only possible with adherence to church rulings on chastity.

In November 2015, the church implemented a further policy stating that the children of same-sex couples could not join the church until the age of 18, and only after they had left their parents' home and renounced same-sex relationships. Mormons in same-sex marriages were named apostates and required to submit to disciplinary hearings and possible excommunication. For those who had seen progress toward a more welcoming stance, the November pronouncement was an especially difficult one.

"It was a real blow to all of us – a really hard blow," Bryce Cook says. "It appears to be a step back from the way the church was going. But it makes our work all the more important. So many gay people will feel less welcome in the church now. If they still want that spiritual connection, it is





FINDING HOPE WHEN LIFE SEEMS HOPELESS

The **LGBTQ Therapists Guild** is a Utah-based, grassroots organization of licensed mental health professionals and students-in-training. They provide a directory of LGBTQ friendly therapists for clients seeking a therapist; resources and books for self-help.

Learn more at www.lgbtqtherapists.com

going to be through grassroots efforts outside the church.”

Cook finds a poignant irony in the new policy, which specifically affects couples who marry. “These are the stable, healthy relationships that we’ve taught our young people to aspire to,” he points out. “We hold marriage up as an example of what they can have, but that’s exactly what’s being condemned in this new policy.”

Nearly 2,000 Mormons resigned from the church in public protest just weeks after the announcement. Even more telling was the tragic and alarming rise in suicides among LGBTQ Mormon youth, with 32 deaths reported between November 2015 and February 2016, all by young people between the ages of 14 and 20.

Gregory Prince, a Mormon scientist and historian, believes that such a crisis might serve as a wake-up call for church leadership. “Sometimes it takes a catastrophe,” he says. “We’ve come close to that in the recent surge in teen suicides, but it appears not close enough.” As a historian, Prince takes the long view. “It’s a gradual process, but in the meantime we’re losing Millennials. They don’t buy homophobia of any flavor. They’re not about to maintain allegiance to a church that is homophobic.”

In his research, Prince finds a recurring pattern of church leaders strengthening a core position at the cost of those on the margins. “This is another chapter in a very sad book,” he says. “The church has beaten up on its intellectuals and its liberals. These are the people who are the spice in the stew, but the church has shown them the door and said good riddance. The LGBTQ community is a perfect example. When I look at the riches they bring, I think, ‘You must be crazy to turn them away!’”



Mormon, LGBTQ and Proud

Living Fully in Faith and Relationships

Despite recent setbacks and a history of anti-LGBTQ doctrine, many men and women who are both LGBTQ and devoutly Mormon choose to remain with the church and to work for change from within. John Gustav-Wrathall, a fifth-generation Mormon, spent his youth on what seemed a clear path, including a mission in the French-speaking part of Switzerland and southeastern France. During his third year at Brigham Young University, he found he could no longer deny the feelings he had for other men.

"It was very clear that marrying a woman was not going to work for me," he remembers. In crisis and severely depressed, he shared his concerns with his bishop, who revoked his Temple Recommend and advised him to marry as quickly as possible. "I walked out thinking, 'I'm never going to be worthy again,'" Gustav-Wrathall says. "That's what tipped me in the direction of thinking about ending my life."

A friendship with an Episcopal priest proved a saving grace. The priest shared his own story of transformation, from being a criminal in a prison cell to providing aid to those struggling with addiction. Gustav-Wrathall recalls, "His story helped me to believe that no matter how much of a mess I was, God still loved me and would speak to me." Working in the priest's garden made that belief tangible. "Working with these living things, I had a sense of the divine in my life and I thought, 'God *does* love me.' But I still couldn't bring myself to pray."

While Gustav-Wrathall was in Helsinki for an internship, he felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. "I'd been taught how to recognize it," he explains. "You feel a certain kind of peace and a peaceful loving presence. And I felt the Holy Spirit saying to me, 'Pray, it's time for you to pray.' And I got down on my knees and I said, 'God I think I'm gay.' And that's when God spoke to me very clearly, telling me, 'I know, because I know you from your inmost being.' I was just enveloped by love and I knew that God knew this about me and accepted me as I was. That was a turning point for me."

Gustav-Wrathall left the church for a long period of time, attending Lutheran services while living in Minneapolis and contemplating life in a monastery, partly to maintain his practice of celibacy. Another spiritual encounter, though, pointed him in a new direction. "I was walking on this bridge across the Mississippi, from the east bank to the west bank," he recalls. "Halfway across, the answer from God came: 'Be open to all the options.'"



Today, Gustav-Wrathall is married to a man and excommunicated from the church. He's also president of an organization that supports and advocates for LGBTQ Mormons. And he participates in his local LDS community. "I've been active in my ward for more than 10 years," he explains. "My husband wasn't happy about it initially. He was convinced it was going to be a wedge between us. But people at church ask how my husband is doing, and they use that word 'husband!'"

He calls it "a topsy-turvy time in the LDS church," with policy and practice often in contradiction. He fears that the most recent announcements will tip the balance. "You have a formal policy which has never been so draconian in drawing a line between gay families and the church," he points out. "At the same time there's never been a higher level of concern and awareness within the Mormon community about this issue, and there's a lot of dialogue and discussion. I am far from hopeless."

Mitch Mayne came out to his parents at 16. They sent him to reparative therapy, but he only attended one session. "I remember looking at the therapist and thinking, 'I've been trying to change myself for 16 years. There's nothing you can do on the outside of me that I haven't tried to do on the inside.'"



As a student at Stanford University, Mayne broke up with his first boyfriend because their love contradicted church teachings. “I saw how much it hurt him, and I knew how much it hurt me,” he remembers. “That night I sat with a bottle of Vicodin in front of me. I must have poured it into my mouth and spit it out again six times.”

In the midst of his despair, Mayne had a quiet epiphany. “It was really simple,” he remembers. “I thought, ‘What if you stop letting other people define who you are, about being Mormon or about being gay?’” It was the first step on a long road that eventually returned Mayne to the church.

He explains, “I was married to a man for many, many years. I wore a ring. And I attended church. I taught Sunday school. And everyone knew. I wasn’t just accepted in my church, I was celebrated. I had the kind of Mormon existence that straight white couples in Provo have.”

When the marriage ended, Mayne became eligible for leadership positions that had previously been closed to him. He joined the district bishopric. “They knew who I was,” he says. “They wanted a gay man in this role specifically to outreach to LGBTQ individuals.” Released from his duties when his bishop left the area, Mayne now fulfills that outreach mission on a broader canvas.

"My life has forever changed trajectories, for better or worse," he says. "I've become a national voice on Mormon LGBTQ issues, and I use that voice to make change within the church." It's been almost two decades since Mayne considered suicide in his Stanford dorm room. "I've reached a point in my spiritual development where I understand that really the only opinion of me that counts more than my own is that of my Savior."

That self-determination also applies to Mayne's place in the LGBTQ community. "I can't be Mormon enough for my Mormon friends," he says, "and I can't be gay enough for the LGBTQ community." In response, he looks to his faith. "What matters is that my Savior wants me to live an authentic, genuine 360-degree life. He created me as a gay man so I can live the life of a gay man. That's the life he atoned for, that's the life that he hung on the cross for."

The pull between two communities is a familiar one to LGBTQ Mormons whose friends question their decision to remain in the church. Emmett Claren, a transgender man and devout Mormon explains, "I've had a lot of friends in the LGBTQ community tell me, 'Dude, just leave. Why would you stay?' My response is, 'One, if I leave like everybody else, I'm not going to help change anything. And, two, for some reason I feel like I belong, and that I am loved. I care what other people think but I care more about what God thinks. What God thinks trumps what everyone else thinks.'"



DECIDING TO TELL OTHERS

SOME BENEFITS OF DISCLOSURE

- Living an authentic and whole life
- Making a viable spiritual path through continued participation
- Becoming a role model for others

SOME RISKS OF COMING OUT

- Not everyone will be understating or accepting
- You may be subject to various forms of discipline, from being denied the Sacrament, Church callings or a temple recommend, to being disfellowshipped or excommunicated, depending on your situation



A Transgender Story

Putting It in God's Hands

For Claren, as for many LGBTQ Mormons, a major step toward acknowledging God's love came with an assessment of how church doctrine stands in contrast to Gospel teachings and personal revelation. "The Gospel of Christ has been part of my life ever since I was little," Claren explains. "I wouldn't be the person I am today without the Gospel in my life. If they were to come and tell me I can't attend church anymore, I still can't just stop believing everything I believe. I can't just stop having this faith."

Claren is often asked about the LDS doctrine stating that gender is "premortal, mortal and eternal." On the surface, the idea seems to reject the transgender experience, but Claren disagrees. "There's a difference between gender and sex," he points out. "My sex when I was born was female but my *gender* – who I am, who my soul is – is male. I know who I am. I'm just making my outer shell match my spirit, my gender, my soul."



FINDING A COMMUNITY

Deciding to live openly is a personal process, but it's not something you have to face alone. Consider joining online support communities, such as Transgender Mormons & Allies at www.facebook.com/groups/450454028337645/

Claren fully embraces the idea that his gender predates his mortal existence on earth. “In our church we believe in preexistence, in a time when we lived with Heavenly Father before we came to earth. We know already what our trials are going to be before we get here. Perhaps we *choose* what kind of trials we’re going to have. That helps, because you know what? God knew I could handle this.”

He laughs at the conversation that might have preceded his arrival on earth. “I was probably so stubborn up there that I said, ‘Give me the hardest trial you’ve got!’

I was always a male, a guy, a male spirit, but I chose to come down to earth in a female body. I’m supposed to be a boy – to have a boy body that matches my boy spirit. And now my spirit and my body are starting to become one.”

It’s been a difficult process but Claren found solace and strength in putting himself in God’s hands. He describes a moment of revelation: “I just prayed, ‘Heavenly Father, I want to be an instrument in your hands. Mold me and make me what you want me to be.’” He laughs, “Be careful what you pray for! The moment you put it in the Lord’s hands, it happens.”

Claren has become a spokesperson for Mormon LGBTQ issues and an example to other transgender Mormons struggling to integrate the entirety of themselves with their faith. “It’s hard,” he admits. “Now there’s all this pressure to really be strong for other people. But I wouldn’t take it back. I’m so blessed and humbled that He would put this responsibility on me.”





The Option to Leave

Seeking Other Paths on the Journey

Kate Kendell, executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, took a different path from Claren, choosing to leave the church and advocating for LGBTQ issues from outside its walls. “In my case, it was not hard to leave the church when I was 19 and came out as a feminist and then a lesbian,” she says.

Kendell suspects that leaving the church is sometimes an easier choice for women. “Men are giving up a status as priesthood holders,” she points out. “They’re the head of the household. They’re regarded as special and as superior to women doctrinally. The priesthood gives them a direct channel to God. That’s a lot harder to walk away from.”

Like many of the people interviewed, Kendell knows openly LGBTQ individuals and couples who participate fully in their local churches. “Affirmation exists for LGBTQ people who are struggling with reconciling their sexual orientation and their faith, people who wish to stay faithful Mormons and be an openly LGBTQ person in relationship with a same-sex partner. I think it’s a minority of LGBTQ people who grow up Mormon and remain active in the faith, but it’s a significant minority.”

Complicating the issue, both for those who stay and those who leave, is the church’s presence in all aspects of the faithful person’s life. “It’s really a lifestyle,” Kendell points out. “It’s not just, ‘Let’s go to church on Sunday and then live the rest of our lives throughout the week.’ It permeates your life. Being immersed like that, then leaving the church – it is not an inconsequential thing.”

Erika Munson, co-founder of Mormons Building Bridges, agrees. “A Mormon congregation is a lot like a small town,” she says. “We’re really close-knit. We’re there for each other.” She recognizes, however, that those small communities are shaped by a much larger structure. “We have a very centralized hierarchical leadership headquartered in Salt Lake City,” she points out. “Their responsibility is to articulate and maintain the doctrine of the LDS church. But our LGBTQ brothers and sisters have spent decades – centuries – in conflict with that doctrine.”

Nevertheless, she looks to the future with hope. “I understand there will be LGBTQ people for whom it is not healthy to stay in the church,” she says. “But I believe that a grassroots movement can work its way up so that everyone in every congregation will be welcoming. A Mormon spends hours every week doing things related to their congregation

– service projects, teaching, visiting. More familiarity and more experience working side by side can't help but start to rise to the top."

Bryce Cook is encouraged by those who remain. "There's an unfortunate black-and-white approach to this," he explains. "People see the church as either all true and all good or it's flawed and all bad. For me, I can tolerate ambiguity and I can see the gray areas. The church is of God, but it's directed by fallible human beings. I'm trying to change the church on the inside because I see the great good that it has done for me and my family, as well as the pain it has caused for my gay kids. But I want to be involved."



Bruce Bastian knows personally the pain of leaving the LDS church – the loss of a faith community, of culture and family, simply for being honest about who you love and who you are as a human being.

“The most important message to LGBTQ Mormons and their loved ones is that the choice to stay or to leave is yours – you can and will be fine and can live a beautiful, successful and authentic life even if you choose to leave – but do not doubt you are precious in the eyes of God, just as you are.”

Bruce W. Bastian grew up in the LDS Church and graduated from Brigham Young University. He is the co-founder of WordPerfect, President of the B.W. Bastian Foundation and a member of the Board of Directors of the Human Rights Campaign.



Companions on the Road

Leaders in Support and Advocacy

While a full list of local and national resources can be found on the following pages, it is important to note three organizations at the forefront of both advocating for LGBTQ Mormons and affirming their ongoing role in the church.

Mama Dragons

“The aptly named Mama Dragons is a Facebook-based support group for Mormon mothers of LGBTQ children. They advocate fiercely for their kids”.

Photographer Kimberly Anderson’s *Mama Dragon Story Project* matches portraits of 80 Mama Dragon members with personal essays about their experience. She explains, “The idea of a mother’s love for her children crosses all faith traditions. There is a soaring number of women who are saying that they reject the notion that their religion forces them to choose between it and their child. ‘I can make that decision for myself,’ they’re saying. ‘God is telling me to love my child.’”

Wendy Montgomery shares the kind of insight with Meg Abhau, also a Mama Dragon, who gave the group its name. Meg shared with Wendy, “It was like this visual in my mind of me puffing up in a way where I was going to be a huge shield between him and the world,” she says of her instinct to protect her gay son. “Mama Bear wasn’t going to do it anymore,” she says. “I needed talons and the ability to fly.”

Since its inception, Mama Dragons has grown from 8 to 750 members. “That speaks to the huge need,” Montgomery points out. “Very often, as a parent, you can’t talk to your friends about it. It’s super taboo. And you need a place to go. We have to remember, the first line of defense for the kids are the parents. If the parents get it, and celebrate the child, that kid is going to be okay.”

Affirmation

One of the most prominent supporting organizations is Affirmation, which advocates for LGBTQ Mormons, their families and allies, and also works with church leaders to create more inclusive environments. Included in the work are national and international conferences, local events, advocacy within the church and an extensive social media presence that offers a wealth of personal narratives. The



organization's leadership team reflects the international diversity of both the Mormon faith and its LGBTQ members.

President John Gustav-Wrathall feels that simple human fellowship is one of the most important services they provide. "We were holding a conference in Fortaleza, Brazil," he remembers. "A young man showed up and you could just see the tension in his body. People immediately welcomed him and reassured him that he was in the right place." When the young visitor shared his story, the group learned that he was living at home, without the means to move out, and that his mother had become emotionally abusive.

"A lot of Affirmation members in Latin America are dependent on their families of origin for a much longer period of time," Gustav-Wrathall explains. "So he was stuck in this unhealthy situation." In the midst of telling his story, the young man stopped, unable to go on. "Another member just got up and said, 'I really feel like you need a hug right now,'" Gustav-Wrathall remembers. "He said he would really like that. And everybody in the group gathered around him. It made all the difference."

Affirmation conferences follow a structure that explores four key elements: self-acceptance, relationship with God, relationship with family and relationship with the church. The last of the four is a distinct focus of the organization.

Gustav-Wrathall offered another example from the Fortaleza conference. "During the planning stages our local leader, who is very involved in the church, was told by his stake president to stop, to cancel the conference. He had a choice.

He could follow those orders and cancel the conference, or he could defy his superior and keep going. But he took a third route. He said, “Can I come in and talk to you about this?” After hearing details of the conference, and its purpose, the stake president allowed the conference to go on unhindered.

“Our goals are to talk, to listen, to engage – to keep the channels open,” Gustav-Wrathall says. “Ultimately, that’s going to create a less toxic atmosphere in the church.”

Mormons Building Bridges

A community of LDS members, Mormons Building Bridges, is centered on the conviction that all people are “inherently worthy of love and belonging in our homes, congregations, and communities.” Co-founder Erika Munson explains, “We see ourselves as a community clearinghouse for great ideas. We don’t want to be seen in opposition to the LDS church but in harmony.”

The group’s website offers a wealth of resources, including guides on how to host a community conversation, a breaking bread dinner, or a political advocacy project. Also available is important information about health and wellness, together with insights on suicide awareness and prevention.

Known for its joyous presence at Pride parades, Mormons Building Bridges provides resources for local organizing and instructions on how to host a Hugging Booth, now a welcome phenomenon at Pride festivals around the world.

“The most powerful thing you can do is reach out one-on-one to someone,” Munson says. “Mormons Building Bridges tries to keep the conversation going. We support people and highlight efforts in local congregations who are making their wards safe and welcoming.”



Helpful Hints for the Journey

Advice from Fellow Travelers

All of the people interviewed for this guide draw strength from the belief that their experience of God and God's love takes precedence over church hierarchy or doctrine. It's a notion embedded in the traditions of the Mormon church, which states in its 11th Article of Faith: "We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience."

"We believe that the inner voice, the Holy Ghost, trumps everything," Wendy Montgomery explains. "If you're getting personal revelation and you believe it's of God, then that takes precedence." Drawing on the power of that core relationship with God has been key for many who struggle.

"If you believe something, don't change that belief because someone says you can't believe it or you don't fit the model," Emmet Claren says. "You have to decide for yourself what you believe and decide that nothing is going to take that away from you." For Claren, that conviction drives his desire to reach out to others. "I want people to know that they are loved by God. It's hard, so hard – but the strength is there to draw nearer to God instead of pushing him away."

Mitch Mayne recognizes that every story is different, and that each individual must take his or her own path. "I wish there were a recipe," he says. "At the end of the day, it is about putting your own personal serenity first, independent of what is done and said around you. I am responsible for my personal serenity – not my church, not my priest, not my prophet."





Like others, he notes the relationship that resides at the center of his faith. "There is nothing that stands between me and my Savior," he says. "That's mine to keep and it's as deep, as meaningful as I choose to make it, whether I go to church or leave the church. Knowing that gives me a sense of stability and security."

Erika Munson knows firsthand that such personal conviction can be a driving force for straight church members who are considering becoming visible and vocal in their support of LGBTQ brothers and sisters. "There are people who



really need us right now," she says. "Gay and trans kids will continue to come up in the church and they need to know there is someone who has their back."

Like others, Munson finds the work transformative. "This is an excellent spiritual practice for me, living with dissonance," she says. "I have to work with people whose worldview differs hugely from mine. I have to learn when to be silent and when to speak up. It's good stuff. It's not easy but it helps me grow."

Final Thoughts

From the many personal stories shared in these pages, it is clear that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints cannot be defined by its hierarchy or even by its doctrines and policies. There is significant and growing support among the Mormon faithful for their LGBTQ brothers and sisters. With that in mind, here are a few thoughts to consider on the journey ahead:

- Practices vary greatly between wards, with some offering a full welcome and a significant level of inclusion.
- Some church leaders are ready to listen respectfully and provide spiritual counsel.
- For those who feel isolated, there is a wealth of online resources, including forums that offer connections to people facing similar struggles.
- There are deeply committed, faithful Mormon allies working within the church and intent on creating a community that recognizes all people as beloved by God.
- The presence and example of LGBTQ people who stay active and engaged in the church can be a powerful catalyst for dialogue, understanding and change.
- Finally, there is the example of Jesus' own life and ministry, which calls for a loving and affirming welcome to all peoples, from all walks of life.

We hope that you'll take full advantage of the resources listed, and that you gained some helpful insights from the many people who contributed to this conversation. We wish you well on the road ahead!



A VERY SPECIAL THANKS to our contributors for so graciously sharing their experiences. For more copies of this guide, additional coming out resources or more information on the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, please visit **hrc.im/mormon**

Resources

LGBTQ AND ALLIED ORGANIZATIONS

Affirmation

An organization that supports LGBTQ and Same Sex Attracted Mormons and their families, friends and Church leaders.

[*www.affirmation.org*](http://www.affirmation.org)

LGBTQ Therapists Guild

A Utah-based grassroots organization of licensed mental-health professionals and students-in-training offering support and resources for Utah LGBTQ, Same-Sex attracted individuals and their allies.

[*www.lgbtqtherapists.com*](http://www.lgbtqtherapists.com)

Mama Dragons

An organization that promotes healthy, loving, and supportive environments for mothers of LGBTQIA children.

[*www.mamadragons.org*](http://www.mamadragons.org)

Mormons Building Bridges

A grassroots organization that provides for thoughtful dialogue and innovation that is available to all LDS people as they approach the question of how to help LGBTQ/SSA people to thrive.

[*www.mormonsbuildingbridges.org*](http://www.mormonsbuildingbridges.org)

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Family Acceptance Project

A research, intervention, education and policy initiative that works to prevent health and mental health risks for LGBT children and youth, including suicide, homelessness and HIV – in the context of their families, cultures and faith communities.

[*familyproject.sfsu.edu*](http://familyproject.sfsu.edu)

I'll Walk With You

A collection of videos created for Latter-day Saint parents and allies to voice their love for their LGBT brothers and sisters, sons and daughters.

www.ldswalkwithyou.org

Voices of Love

A public education initiative that aspires to create a space for those with Mormon roots to tell their happy endings.

www.voicesoflove.org

ONLINE SUPPORT GROUPS

Bisexual, Pansexual, Queer+ Mormons and Allies

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/352998728185745/>

LGBT Mormon People of Color and Allies

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/134166980037744/>

Grupo Mundial en Español

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/813183095387911/>

Transgender Mormons & Allies

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/450454028337645/>

Understanding Same-Gender Attraction – Brigham Young University

<https://www.facebook.com/UsGaAtByu>

The HRC Religion and Faith Program is working to create a world where nobody is forced to choose between who they are, whom they love and what they believe. Thanks in part to this work, more and more Mormons aren't simply engaging in dialogue around LGBTQ equality, they're leading the conversation. They do this work not in spite of their Mormon belief or values, but because of them. To learn more, visit hrc.im/mormon

To learn more about the Religion and Faith Program, visit hrc.org/religion



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