

7 February 2014

Thomas S. Monson, President
Office of the First Presidency
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
47 East South Temple Street
Salt Lake City, Utah 84150-1200

Dear President Monson:

We are a part of a community of thousands of current and former members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Recent events surrounding the Church have prompted us to add our voices to the conversation about the desire for transparency.

We speak out as current and former bishops, Relief Society presidents, Elders Quorum presidents, Primary presidents, Young Women and Young Men leaders, missionaries, and tithing payers. We loved the Church and we still love its members, but many of us have made the difficult choice to leave. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf summed up the feelings many of us have when he said:

One might ask, "If the gospel is so wonderful, why would anyone leave?"

Sometimes we assume it is because they have been offended or lazy or sinful. Actually, it is not that simple. In fact, there is not just one reason that applies to the variety of situations....

Some struggle with unanswered questions about things that have been done or said in the past.¹

We began to carefully examine our unanswered questions and were shocked by what we discovered. We looked through vast collections of documents online and learned critical details involving church history that had never been shared with us: multiple accounts of the First Vision, controversy around the source and translation of The Book of Abraham, changing views regarding Native American lineage, issues surrounding polygamy and polyandry, Priesthood roles in the early church, the source of the Book of Mormon text, and many other issues—all issues we were previously unaware of. After attending, serving, and participating fully in the Church, we felt these were issues we should have known about and that the emotional anguish which resulted could easily have been avoided.

I think in the past there was a tendency to keep a lot of the records closed or at least not give access to information. But the world has changed in the last generation—with the access to information on the Internet, we can't continue that pattern; I think we need to continue to be more open.²

— Elder Steven E. Snow, Church Historian and Recorder

We are pleased to see that the leadership of the Church has recognized this need to grant wider access to accurate information by publishing a series of essays on LDS.org addressing some of these controversial issues. We applaud this new move toward openness and transparency. Unfortunately, these essays are simply tucked away in the alphabetical list of Gospel Topics, making it difficult for the majority of members in the global Church to discover. While these essays are helpful in beginning a dialogue about our concerns, they are not labeled as official doctrine or policy which frequently leads members of the Church to be wary of their contents. They are a step in the right direction, but there is much more that should be addressed.

This lack of clarity makes it difficult for some of the most faithful members to research accurate church history, or to trust family members who may share it with them. When we learn something new that we want to share with our families and loved ones, we are often met with suspicion and distrust, leading to discord, contention, and unhappiness in our relationships. The strife affecting so many goes against the Church's own counsel on building love within our families:

Feeling the security and constancy of love from a spouse, a parent, or a child is a rich blessing. Such love nurtures and sustains faith in God. Such love is a source of strength and casts out fear (see 1 John 4:18). Such love is the desire of every human soul.³

— Elder David A. Bednar

Those of us who have already encountered the problems and chosen to leave have been labeled *angry*, *offended*, and *sinful*; Sunday school lessons portray those who leave the Church as *greedy*, *evil*, *haughty*, *scheming*, *careless*, *fallen*, and more.⁴ This vilification comes at a tremendous cost: relationships have become strained, marriages have ended, children and grandchildren have been kept from their loved ones, and employment and housing have been lost. Worse still, too many of us have lost loved ones to suicide due to this unnecessary and cruel isolation. By bringing these and other historical and theological issues into the light, we hope to open genuine dialogues and to begin repairing damaged relationships while building new ones.

We are specifically asking for:

- Increased awareness for the existing and upcoming topic essays through online and print announcements and global availability in official publications of the Church
- Translation of the topic essays to other languages for a greater international reach
- Inclusion of publication dates, authorship attributions, and an indication of the content being or not being official policies or doctrines of the Church, for all online and print content
- Inclusion of this information in the correlated material used in church meetings, seminary, MTC courses, and with investigators
- New lessons and training to directly address the challenges faced by mixed-faith families and how to maintain strong relationships in these situations
- Separation of civil marriage and Temple Sealing ceremonies allowing for the inclusion of all family members
- Ending the rhetoric that tears down those who question or leave the faith and puts families at odds with each other
- The same level of transparency into the finances of the Church that is expected from other non-profit and religious organizations

We feel that the time has come for the Church to commit to complete transparency.

*[W]e have nothing to hide. Our history is an open book. They may find what they are looking for, but the fact is the history of the Church is clear and open and leads to faith and strength and virtues.*⁵

— President Gordon B. Hinckley

All former, current, and future members of the Church deserve complete, honest, and accurate information in regards to church history, doctrine, finances, and culture.

Sincerely,

The Current Supporters of this Open Letter to President Thomas S. Monson

<http://www.mormonopenletter.com/signatures>

References:

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Come, Join with Us," *October 2013 General Conference Report*, Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013.
2. Blair Hodges, "Truth in Church History: Excerpts from the *Religious Educator's* Q&A with Elder Steven Snow," November 8, 2013, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/truth-in-church-history-excerpts-from-the-religious-educators-qa-with-elder-steven-snow/> (accessed February 7, 2014).
3. David A. Bednar, "More Diligent and Concerned at Home," *October 2009 General Conference Report*, Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009.
4. "Chapter 27: Beware the Bitter Fruits of Apostasy," *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011.
5. Jennifer Dobner, "Pres. Hinckley answers myriad questions about the LDS Church," December 25, 2005, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/635171604/Pres-Hinckley-answers-myriad-questions-about-the-LDS-Church.html?pg=all> (accessed February 7, 2014).