

# Community of Christ

**Educational Materials for 2010 World Conference  
Legislation Regarding Same-Sex Marriage and  
Homosexuality Issues**

**An Overview of Relevant Policies, Doctrine, and  
Resolutions**

**September 2009**

## Same-Sex Marriage and Homosexuality Issues in the Church An Overview of Relevant Policies, Doctrine, and Resolutions

In 1835 while the Doctrine and Covenants was compiled a document on marriage was prepared and read at the general assembly of August 17, 1835. Although officially not considered a revelation it was unanimously adopted by that assembly, “and was ordered to be printed in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants”, and as such appeared in the Appendix of the 1835 version, titled Section 101. It has been retained in every edition of the Reorganization, and it became known as **Section 111**. (See Appendix A) It describes a marriage as one between one man and one woman, who as a result of the marriage will be pronounced “husband and wife”. Verse 4b states:

*“Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe that one man should have one wife; and one woman but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.”*

In response to questions about Divorce and Remarriage the General Conference of the Church adopted on April 9, 1884 **Resolution 272**. It puts forward that a marriage is between “husband and wife.” (See Appendix B)

On October 18, 1961 the Standing High Council adopted a **memorandum** titled **“Homosexuality and Other Sexual Perversions,”** which was superseded by the 1982 statement on Homosexuality (see below).

As the church is reaching out in non-Western nations and finds itself ministering to people living in polygamist relationships the church in 1972 is divinely counseled, known as **Section 150**

*“Monogamy is the basic principle on which Christian married life is built. Yet, as I have said before, there are also those who are not of this fold to whom the saving grace of the gospel must go. When this is done the church must be willing to bear the burden of their sin, nurturing them in the faith, accepting that degree of repentance which it is possible for them to achieve, looking forward to the day when through patience and love they can be free as a people from the sins of the years of their ignorance.”* [D&C 150:10]

The church upholds monogamy, condemns polygamy, but forgives those not yet aware. Section 150 also provides guidance on the process. It states

*“To this end and for this purpose, continue your ministry to those nations of people yet unaware of the joy freedom from sin can bring into their lives. In this way they will be brought to a knowledge of the teachings of my gospel and be made ready and willing to help spread the message of reconciliation and restoration to other worthy souls.*

*In this ministry the apostolic council, as the chief witnesses of the gospel, are directed to interpret and administer the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel in a manner appropriate to the circumstances in which they find such person.”* [D&C 150:11]

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In 1982 the Standing High Council adopted a new **memorandum on “Homosexuality”**, superseding the previous 1961 statement. (See Appendix C) This memorandum provides the following guidelines

1. *The church recognizes that there is a difference between homosexual orientation and homosexual activity (defined as sexual acts between persons of the same sex). The former is accepted as a condition over which a person may have little or no control; the latter is considered immoral and cannot be condoned by the church.*
2. *The church affirms that Christian marriage is a sacred covenant relationship, ordained of God between a man and a woman. The sacrament of marriage has a long theological and ecclesiastical history, and the symbolism is exclusively heterosexual. Homosexual unions are not and should not be considered marriages in the sacramental sense.*
3. *The church affirms the worth of all persons. Homosexuals as well as heterosexuals are children of God and have full claim upon the acceptance and reconciling ministry and care of the church. That is, individuals with a homosexual orientation who refrain from homosexual acts should be fully accepted into the ongoing life of the congregation. Those persons who engage in homosexual acts should be dealt with in terms of redemptive ministry and/or church law procedures in the same way as those who engage in heterosexual acts outside of marriage.*
4. *In the critical matter of ordination, the church should not admit a practicing homosexual to the priesthood. It cannot sanction homosexual acts as morally acceptable behavior any more than it can endorse heterosexual promiscuity. If a member of the priesthood admits to, or is found to be engaged in homosexual behavior, the administrative officer having jurisdiction should institute procedures for silencing according to church law.*
5. *There will be instances in which those in leadership positions will become aware of individuals who are non-practicing homosexuals and who are seeking help in the area of sublimating their sexual impulses. For such persons, the possibility and opportunity for ordination should be kept open.*

On April 6, 1984, the World Conference adopted a **Resolution 1182** on Marriage and Termination of Marriage. It conveys that, marriage is ordained by God, monogamous, and a sacred covenant between husband and wife.

In response to the 2002 World Conference sermon by President W. Grant McMurray in which he admitted that exceptions had been made to the prevailing policies by ordaining sexually active homosexual men and women, the WCLC provided the **statement “Community, Common Consent, and the Issue of Homosexuality”**. (See Appendix D) It reaffirms the 1982 Standing High Council statement as guideline governing the church, while the church continues to seek God’s direction and engages in a process that “honors our community and the principles of common consent that govern us.” In response to already performed ordinations of homosexuals, the statement reads, *“This will not affect those ordinations that have been previously provided for, even if they were exceptions to the guidelines. We will not make further exceptions to the guidelines on calling and ordination unless they are adjusted through the common consent of the people.”*

# Same-Sex Marriage and Homosexuality Issues in the Church

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The **2005 Church Administrator's Handbook**, page 59, affirms the prevailing policy on Marriage. It reiterates that ministers are not authorized “to perform marriages between two persons of the same sex”, and adds “even in jurisdictions where such marriages are legally valid.” The addition of this phrase is in response to several nations and U.S. states where the church is active, where legislation has passed or is being considered to legalize same-sex marriages.

At the 2007 World Conference, the church received the **report by the Committee on Homosexuality on the Church**. (See Appendix E) The committee presented its efforts during the previous 5 years, but it did not present any “set of recommendations for action” to church, as none of the committee’s ideas would “suddenly take away the disagreements about this issue that exist in the church today.” Instead, it suggested values and principles for the future.

### **Values**

- 1. The church continues to value the inestimable worth of each person. Some of us would, therefore, say that lack of love, acceptance, and tolerance for all persons is immoral. Yet others of us would say that homosexual behaviors are inherently immoral; those who engage in them are to be loved but not fully accepted in our congregations and/or sacraments. Let us remember that God's love is deeper than we can imagine, and we are challenged to learn how to extend compassion and kindness to all.*
- 2. All of us stand in need of redemption, regardless of our sexual orientation and regardless of whether or not we have been ordained. The church must make judgments about the conditions those called to priesthood office must meet, but we do not make these judgments with clean hands. “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Regardless of whether we believe that those involved in homosexual activity should be ordained or not, we each arrive at our conclusion as a fallen person who is in need of God's grace and forgiveness.*
- 3. We value the teachings and healing ministry of Jesus Christ as the example of how we should live our lives. The gospel of Jesus Christ addresses a broad range of human nature and experience. Although refraining from homosexual activity is seen as a fundamental characteristic of Christian discipleship in many societies, for some societies and individuals this is not the case. However, care should be exercised in our denominational deliberations, lest this one issue overshadow all other concerns in carrying out the mission of the church.*
- 4. We trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to both unite and transform us. Although we must extend our own efforts toward unity, we cannot achieve this goal through our abilities alone. It is God who unites us through the gospel. And it is the Holy Spirit who transforms us, if we work to discern the Spirit's guidance.*

### **Principles**

- 1. The church's disagreement about the issue of homosexuality is an example of the church's woundedness. We seek to share in a community in which all disagreements have peaceful outcomes, in which every person feels loved and accepted, and in which the gospel is always shared clearly, compassionately, and without distortion. We recognize that this does not always happen in our life together, and the church depends on the mutual forgiveness of its members, as well as the grace and mercy of God.*

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2. *The best way to address our differences is to express them openly and clearly with respect and caring for those who hold a different point of view. We cannot hide from the things that divide us. Rather, we must continually be about the process of reconciling ministry with each other. We seek to be a better example of the gospel than we currently are.*
3. *We currently lack unity regarding the issue of homosexuality and other issues, so we depend on mutual forgiveness and forbearance. Our current policies and procedures are hurtful to some members with regard to many issues, so we must express loving care toward each other.*
4. *This issue raises significant questions about how the Community of Christ can best reach decisions on such matters. It pushes us to grapple more seriously with how we discern God's will, how we reach consensus, how we best organize ourselves to do the work of the church around the world.*
5. *It will be difficult for the church to move beyond the 2002 statement of the World Church Leadership Council titled "Community, Common Consent, and the Issue of Homosexuality." This is not because we see the statement as being fully adequate; it is not. For those who feel that the church needs a more inclusive policy, the 2002 statement simply keeps long-standing provisions in place, albeit with explicit references to the worth of all persons. At the same time, many feel that this statement is too tentative and does not appear to take a firm stand on the issue of homosexuality; it simply states what we will do for now. We rely on the love and forgiveness of God and each other to help us move forward from this point.*
6. *We can feel encouraged that we have been able to address such a topic as openly and directly as we have. We are in the minority of Christian denominations in the world that have engaged the topic seriously. That is a prophetic response by the church. We must do better, but we have taken important steps through creating a study committee, exploring the issues, and adopting the Listening Circles approach as a caring and respectful way to deal with controversy among us.*

Over these past years, several nations have legalized same-sex marriage, e.g. The Netherlands, Belgium, and Canada. The topic has also been on the agenda of many states in the U.S., which has led to state legislation or rulings by state courts that has provided the legal ground for same-sex couples to get married, e.g. in Iowa. In response to these recent legal developments and inquiries from Community of Christ priesthood asked to perform marriages, the First Presidency sent out communications in May 2009 (see Appendix F) reiterating the church's policy. It states "*To allow Community of Christ priesthood officiate in same-sex marriage, when our policy does not allow it, during a time in which the church still is sorting through this divisive issue, would only cause further division and reduce participation in the discussion process.*"

In July, the First Presidency provided the staff in Canada and the U.S. with a list of talking points on the issue. They were offered to "provide a consistent response to questions and communications directed to their office." (See Appendix G)

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## APPENDIX A

### D&C Section 111

*This section on marriage is not a revelation. It was prepared while the Book of Doctrine and Covenants was being compiled and was read by W. W. Phelps at the general assembly of August 17, 1835. It was adopted unanimously by that assembly as part of the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. It has been retained in every edition of the book published by the Reorganization, and the church knows no other law of marriage than that which is set forth here.*

1a. According to the custom of all civilized nations, marriage is regulated by laws and ceremonies:

1b. therefore we believe, that all marriages in this Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints should be solemnized in a public meeting, or feast, prepared for that purpose:

1c. and that the solemnization should be performed by a presiding high priest, high priest, bishop, elder, or priest, not even prohibiting those persons who are desirous to get married, of being married by other authority.

1d. We believe that it is not right to prohibit members of this church from marrying out of the church, if it be their determination so to do, but such persons will be considered weak in the faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2a. Marriage should be celebrated with prayer and thanksgiving; and at the solemnization, the persons to be married, standing together, the man on the right, and the woman on the left, shall be addressed, by the person officiating, as he shall be directed by the Holy Spirit; and if there be no legal objections, he shall say, calling each by their names:

2b. "You both mutually agree to be each other's companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives?"

2c. And when they have answered "Yes," he shall pronounce them "husband and wife" in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of the laws of the country and authority vested in him:

2d. "May God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and for ever. Amen."

3. The clerk of every church should keep a record of all marriages solemnized in his branch.

4a. All legal contracts of marriage made before a person is baptized into this church, should be held sacred and fulfilled.

4b. Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe that one man should have one wife; and one woman but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.

4c. It is not right to persuade a woman to be baptized contrary to the will of her husband, neither is it lawful to influence her to leave her husband.

4d. All children are bound by law to obey their parents; and to influence them to embrace any religious faith, or be baptized, or leave their parents without their consent, is unlawful and unjust.

4e. We believe that (\*) all persons who exercise control over their fellow--beings, and prevent them from embracing the truth, will have to answer for that sin.

(\*) The original text reads as follows: husbands, parents and masters who exercise control over their fellow--beings, and prevent them from embracing the truth, will have to answer for that sin.

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APPENDIX B

WCR 272

*Adopted April 9, 1884*

Whereas, We believe that marriage is ordained of God, and that the law of God provides for but one companion in wedlock, for either man or woman – except in cases where the contract is broken by death or transgression; therefore

*Resolved*, That it is our understanding that in case of separation of husband and wife, one of which is guilty of the crime of fornication, or adultery, the other becomes released from the marriage bond, and if they so desire may obtain a divorce and marry again.

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## APPENDIX C

### Homosexuality

#### *1982 Statement by the Standing High Council*

Since the adoption by the Standing High Council of the memorandum entitled, "Homosexuality and Other Sexual Perversions," (October 18, 1961), there has been a profusion of social, psychological, and medical studies pertaining to the issue of homosexuality, and with it has come debate, reflection, and confrontation, both within and outside the church. Other denominational bodies, through special task forces and in their legislative assemblies, have in recent years attempted to address this pressing problem which exists among many of their members, families, and friends. The church feels under obligation today to restate its position on homosexuality for the guidance of administrative officials, and out of a genuine concern that a responsible, reconciling ministry be developed in relation to this difficult problem.

In June 1978, the First Presidency appointed a Human Sexuality Committee composed of representatives of professional disciplines and World Church divisions and quorums. This committee was charged with the task of exploring the area of human sexuality and recommending to the First Presidency ways in which the church can be ministerially responsible and responsive in this aspect of human life. Two years later the Human Sexuality Committee forwarded its final comprehensive report to the First Presidency. It contained formal papers which explored a wide range of issues and problems in the vital area of human sexuality, and concluded with affirmations and recommendations which it hoped would aid the church in developing an ethical and theological framework to strengthen the teaching of the church in matters of sexual behavior.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, the church convened a task force to continue the process of developing and sharing insights in this area.

One of the aspects of human sexuality which the task force studied with a view to making recommendations to the church was the subject of homosexuality. The concern of the church is to provide ministries and develop the kinds of values that will lead to better understanding concerning homosexuality and encourage a regard for justice and a respect for dignity which both the church and society owe to all human beings.

While we seek always to keep faith with the moral perceptions of the restored gospel, we recognize that theology is dynamic and needs to be interpreted in light of changing cultures and times. Nevertheless, a position statement on this issue will likely produce tension and controversy on several bases--strongly held traditional attitudes, varying interpretations of scripture, insufficiency of our present knowledge, and the present inadequacies of the church's ministries in helping members understand the meaning of sexuality in human relationships. These, among others, are reasons why judgments about homosexuality are, of necessity, open to further review.

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We call attention to the statement on homosexuality as printed in the Leader's Handbook, copyright 1980, 1981. "The church leadership continues to explore ways and means of ministering to homosexuals. The emphasis should be placed upon Christian values in all sexual behavior. An attitude of love and understanding should affirm the worth of every person."

The purpose of the present document is to update our understanding of current scientific data, address ethical implications, and make recommendations which will be helpful in assisting church administrators in dealing with the condition and activity of homosexuality.

### **CURRENT SCIENTIFIC DATA**

Although there are many theories, there is still little agreement as to the roles which genetic, glandular, cultural, or psychological factors play in the cause or origin of sexual orientation. In regard to homosexual orientation, all available evidence points to this being an extremely complicated phenomenon for which there seem to be multiple causative factors. Among these may be an inherited predisposition, or an inappropriate identification with the parent of the opposite sex. Cultural overemphasis on the stereotypes of "masculinity" and "femininity" producing feelings of inadequacy in those not able to fulfill these expectations, and a rigid dichotomy of male and female social roles with no allowance for any variation in personality development also are cited as possible contributing factors.<sup>2</sup>

### **SCRIPTURAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

While the sacred writings of the scriptures provide us with insights into the pattern of God's redemptive and reconciling activity in all ages, they rarely provide final or complete answers. Effective preaching and teaching must always include interpretation relative to changing times and cultures. While the basic witness of scripture holds true for all time, virtually all aspects of humankind's relationship with God, including sexuality, are related to the cultural norms and traditions of the times. For example, it is not possible to interpret correctly the Leviticus Holiness Code without taking into account its historically conditioned context; many scholars suggest that the specific sexual prohibitions are related more to idolatry and other practices of the pagan populations around the Hebrews, rather than to intrinsic deviations.

Any adequate Christian position on homosexuality must regard the authority of scripture. The biblical passages primarily cited in relation to this issue are Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22, and 20:13, Romans 1:18-32, I Corinthians 6:9, and I Timothy 1:10. All of these indicate that heterosexual relationships are part of God's plan for humankind. Nowhere do any scriptures offer support for or condone homosexual relationships. Our understanding of scriptures affirms that heterosexual marriage is God's will for men and for women. The teachings of Jesus also are clear with respect to marriage--he affirmed heterosexual marriage to be God's original and enduring will for men and women.

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Specific references to homosexuality are lacking in either the Book of Mormon or the Doctrine and Covenants.

The principles of the gospel apply equally to heterosexuals and homosexuals. Repentance implies the act of being personally responsible for choices; Christian freedom never allows one to live as he or she selfishly pleases. The love of God and the evidence of Christ's earthly ministry always make a distinction between the sin and the sinner. The power of the Holy Spirit constantly seeks to free each individual from acts of disobedience and alienation.

In summary, the issue of homosexuality is demanding increased attention in Western society today. Though the church is faced with changing attitudes about the existence and expression of homosexuality, it continues to hold to the norm of heterosexuality and exclusively sanctions heterosexual marriage. In doing so, the church recognizes that homosexual Christians and heterosexual Christians are all brothers and sisters and share in common the love and grace of God.

In addition, the church is aware that anti-homosexual bias has long existed in Western cultures in general, and that homosexuals have been and still are denied social justice.

In light of the preceding, the following guidelines should be noted by administrative officials in carrying out the teachings of the church and performing ministry involving cases of homosexuality.

1. The church recognizes that there is a difference between homosexual orientation and homosexual activity (defined as sexual acts between persons of the same sex). The former is accepted as a condition over which a person may have little or no control; the latter is considered immoral and cannot be condoned by the church.
2. The church affirms that Christian marriage is a sacred covenant relationship, ordained of God between a man and a woman. The sacrament of marriage has a long theological and ecclesiastical history, and the symbolism is exclusively heterosexual. Homosexual unions are not and should not be considered marriages in the sacramental sense.
3. The church affirms the worth of all persons. Homosexuals as well as heterosexuals are children of God and have full claim upon the acceptance and reconciling ministry and care of the church. That is, individuals with a homosexual orientation who refrain from homosexual acts should be fully accepted into the ongoing life of the congregation. Those persons who engage in homosexual acts should be dealt with in terms of redemptive ministry and/or church law procedures in the same way as those who engage in heterosexual acts outside of marriage.
4. In the critical matter of ordination, the church should not admit a practicing homosexual to the priesthood. It cannot sanction homosexual acts as morally acceptable behavior any more than it can endorse heterosexual promiscuity. If a member of the priesthood admits to, or is found to be engaged in homosexual

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behavior, the administrative officer having jurisdiction should institute procedures for silencing according to church law.

5. There will be instances in which those in leadership positions will become aware of individuals who are non-practicing homosexuals and who are seeking help in the area of sublimating their sexual impulses. For such persons, the possibility and opportunity for ordination should be kept open.

The concern of the church with the practice of homosexuality is to provide ministries which encourage the development of wholesome heterosexual attitudes.

When the practice of homosexuality comes to the attention of the church officials, advice as to appropriate ministries should be sought from the First Presidency. Counseling resources which are available in community agencies should be used when possible.

The church leadership continues to explore ways and means of ministering to homosexuals. The emphasis should be placed upon Christian values in all sexual behavior. An attitude of love and understanding should affirm the worth of every person.

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<sup>1</sup>These affirmations were published in the *Saints Herald* for March 1, 1981, in the first of six articles dealing with a review of the work of the Human Sexuality Committee.

<sup>2</sup>The label of homosexuality is often misunderstood. The word "homosexuality" denotes a condition, a state of affairs; it does not denote a course of conduct. A distinction must, therefore, always be made between homosexual orientation and homosexual activity, between the categories of "being" and "doing."

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## APPENDIX D

### **Community, Common Consent, and the Issue of Homosexuality**

*The World Church Leadership Council met in a retreat setting September 15–19, 2002. During that time extensive attention was given to implementation of the sharing goal, interquorum functions and relationships, review of budget projections, and a variety of other significant issues. The Council also participated in a discussion of the church's processing of the homosexuality dialogue since the 2002 World Conference. From those reflections the Council developed the following statement as further guidance to the church on this sensitive and important matter.*

The church has been called to a loving and respectful dialogue on the difficult and often divisive issue of homosexuality. We have traveled to scores of camps and reunions this summer and are aware that many people are troubled by the questions and conflicted over how to handle them. We are saddened by the pain and confusion that some are feeling. As church leaders we are determined to both grapple prophetically with issues before us and yet process them in a way that honors our community and the principles of common consent that govern us. Such challenges have confronted the church in every generation.

If the church is to be faithful to the demands of the gospel it will often be called beyond the boundaries of certainty to explore its implications in a complex world. We are deeply committed to seeking God's direction and embodying the life and ministry of Jesus in our own personal ministry and in the lived-out witness of the church. Even while doing so, God's people are also called to live together in love and to embrace the rich diversity of our global family. A creative and challenging tension will always exist between the desire for unity within the body and the need to press the limits of our understanding. We embrace both those principles in exploring the issue of homosexuality within our community.

In terms of policy we are aware that some are concerned that a few exceptions have been made to the 1982 Standing High Council statement guidelines that have governed us in the matter of homosexuality and ordination. That discomfort is shared by all of us in leadership, even in our awareness of the exceptions and the human and pastoral issues surrounding them.

As indicated by President W. Grant McMurray in his 2002 World Conference sermon we are asked to seek issues on which we can agree and shape dialogue in areas where we do not agree. As we continue this exploration we want the church to know that we will follow the provisions of the 1982 guidelines regarding calling and ordination. This will not affect those ordinations that have been previously provided for, even if they were exceptions to the guidelines. We will not make further exceptions to the guidelines on calling and ordination unless they are adjusted through the common consent of the people.

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In terms of further processing and dialogue, we understand very well that various areas of the church need to approach the matter differently. In some nations it is not possible to even discuss it because of cultural and legal issues. In other places, regardless of how individuals may feel, the question is very much a part of the culture in which the church is ministering and we have no choice but to talk together about it. Each field apostle, in consultation with local leaders, will be responsible for determining whether that field will participate in the dialogue and what methods will be used. The World Church staff specializing in conflict resolution is designing a dialogue process that can be adapted to each area as appropriate. This process honors all viewpoints and provides abundant time and opportunity for each perspective to be heard and understood.

In our deliberations within the World Church Leadership Council we focused primarily on how we can effectively implement the two components of the sharing goal: "Each one, reach one" and "Honor God's call to tithe." This is fundamental to the fulfillment of our church's mission. There will always be issues upon which substantial disagreement will exist among faithful members of our community. Our task as a community of God's people is to invite all to share in the fellowship, respect one another in our diversity, listen and learn from each other in love, and look beyond the things that may divide us to embrace our essential unity in Jesus Christ. The church has been counseled that "the path will not always be easy, the choices will not always be clear," but we have also been promised that "the cause is sure and the Spirit will bear witness to the truth, and those who live the truth will know the hope and the joy of discipleship in the community of Christ" (Doctrine and Covenants 161:7).

As church leaders we live willingly in the tension between certainty and the demands of faith. We proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and pledge anew to work tirelessly to build the communities of joy, hope, love, and peace that are at the heart of our mission. To do so requires openness and transparency, unconditional love and respect for one another, and a willingness to rely on the leadings and assurance of the Holy Spirit in all things. We commit our personal ministry and our collective leadership to that end.

World Church Leadership Council  
September 2002

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## APPENDIX E

### 2007 Committee on Homosexuality and the Church Report

#### Committee Mandate

The committee was formed following the 2002 World Conference and was charged by the First Presidency to provide overview and guidance to the churchwide dialogue process regarding homosexuality in the church and make recommendations to the First Presidency regarding future policy or guidelines.

The committee has met over a number of weekends during the past four years to respond to the mandate, with many activities by subcommittees scheduled in the interims.

#### Summary of Committee Activities

The committee was first convened in November 2002. The committee has met formally eleven times, with an initial report shared at the 2004 World Conference.

Work has been performed by the committee as a whole, as well as by three subcommittees:

- The Communications Subcommittee, chaired by Kathy Robinson, is responsible for facilitating communication with key groups, church leaders, and church membership. This subcommittee has used a variety of approaches, including written reports and communications; discussion/information meetings with a variety of groups; Herald articles; 10-Minute News, etc.
- The Policy Subcommittee, chaired by Don Compier, is responsible for exploring a broad range of policy-related issues and possibilities, based on a review of the views of our membership, as well as other denominations, cultures, and theological viewpoints. This subcommittee has extensively surveyed information about how similar issues have been handled in other denominations and organizations; studied issues of theology, scripture, and doctrine; and remained committed to listening to and soliciting input from members regarding possible future policy options.
- The Listening/Dialogue Subcommittee, chaired by Sandee Gamet, is responsible for facilitating mutual listening through a dialogue process called Listening Circles. This subcommittee has led in the design of Listening Circles (an approach that assists us to listen to one another in ways that enhance trust and mutual respect despite differing views); and trained Listening Circle facilitators.

#### Introduction of Listening Circles as a Useful Tool

From the beginning, the committee has been prayerful and hopeful that the potential divisiveness of this issue could be avoided within the loving body of the Community of Christ. We are convinced that our approaches to dealing with the issues of homosexuality should be consistent with the ministry of Jesus Christ and the counsel in D. & C.

122:17b: “Let nothing separate you from each other and the work whereunto you have been called....”

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With these things in mind, therefore, the Listening Circles process was introduced to the church as a tool for members to use for engaging sensitive and controversial issues. The Listening Circle approach, though coming out of this committee, is presented to the church as a supportive tool to help members listen to the perspectives of each person and to increase the capacity of members to better understand each other in the midst of differing points of view.

Listening Circles develop and deepen relationships. They enhance understanding between participants and develop our capacity for discernment. The process facilitates communication, and is suited for a variety of topics. Although Listening Circles were at first focused on the topic of homosexuality in the church, other topics have been added in order to encourage participation and to use this communication tool more comprehensively.

### **Update on Listening Circles**

The first organizational meeting occurred in October 2003. Since that time, 34 mission centers in the United States have held organizational meetings with mission center leaders and interested members to implement Listening Circles. As of December 2006, 29 mission centers had completed facilitator training, with 574 people trained in the United States and the Netherlands.

Twenty Listening Circles have been completed, i.e., groups of no fewer than four members who have met for at least six sessions. At least 200 people have participated in Listening Circles, though some of those participants attended fewer than six sessions.

Since the inception of Listening Circles, ongoing modifications have been made to the implementation process in order to fit the needs of each mission center, and training has been enhanced. In addition, as mission centers have engaged in Listening Circles, opportunities have evolved to use the tool to address mission center and congregational needs and issues. Five volunteers have been certified to provide Listening Circle training, and two others can serve as coaches.

Evaluations of the Listening Circle process have been developed. Participants complete a pre-experience survey before attending their orientation session. They complete three evaluations during the six- to ten-session experience, concluding with a final evaluation. Evaluations have been very positive. Eighty-eight percent agree or strongly agree that their experience has been positive.

### **Experiences of Other Denominations**

The committee has sought to explore the issues related to homosexuality in the church through a variety of approaches. One area of study has been the review of the experiences of other denominations.

It is important to understand that Community of Christ is not alone in considering the issue of homosexuality and its impact on church life. Some denominations have strongly decided the matter. These include denominations that have policies that are both broadly

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inclusive (United Church of Christ, United Church of Canada, Uniting Church of Australia, etc.) and broadly restrictive (Southern Baptists, Assemblies of God, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, etc.)

Our experience is more like those denominations with widely diverging perspectives, which have typically generated more controversy and internal tension. These denominations include the Presbyterians, United Methodists, Lutherans (ELCA), Anglicans, Disciples of Christ, American Baptists, and others. Although these denominations have differing structures of governance, they have generally formed study committees, drafted reports, and made recommendations to church officers and/or legislative bodies, but they have yet to fully resolve the issue.

Recent controversy in the Anglican Communion (which includes the Episcopal Church in the U.S.) demonstrates how a denomination with a strong international character can experience conflict resulting from widely varying cultural perspectives. Anglicans have dealt with many issues of a controversial nature by adopting culturally appropriate approaches within each nation. The ordination of a gay bishop in the United States has created a significant rift in the denomination in recent years. This raises questions about whether any denomination can address the issue of homosexuality by adopting different standards on a national or regional basis.

In general, denominations that have widely varying perspectives on homosexuality have not been able to resolve the matter definitively without significant division and the threat of schism. On one hand, this could be viewed as being very discouraging in that it seems to forecast continued division. On the other hand, it suggests that our inability to resolve the matter in a final way is not because we have handled the issue poorly, but because resolving the matter of homosexuality in a denomination with diverse perspectives on the matter is an extraordinarily difficult task. In fact, one could argue that, to this point, we have come to the current moment with far less ill will and divisiveness than many other denominations have experienced. We value our common call to mission and our sense of community, and this has helped us listen to each other and seek mutual understanding.

### **Challenges**

This does not mean that we have escaped the dangers inherent in this debate. Several challenges are still before us.

We are an international church.

- The church has been established in a variety of cultures. A position that would be very acceptable in some settings and cultures would be seen in others as either not upholding appropriate moral standards or ignoring the church's call to uphold the worth of all persons. While issues related to homosexuality are subject to wide disagreement and debate in some cultures, it is not a subject of discussion (or even permitted to be discussed) in others.
- In some nations, deliberations in the church could be affected by legal requirements. There are currently some nations in which wide acceptance of homosexuality in the church could lead to ostracism or losing permission to

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operate legally. There are other nations in which action by the church/Conference on issues related to homosexuality could be seen as discriminatory, possibly leading to legal sanctions.

We have ongoing differing viewpoints.

- Those in the church who feel strongly about issues related to homosexuality from one perspective or another have shown considerable patience and forbearance as these matters have been discussed. The church has benefited greatly from having time to give careful consideration to this issue, but this benefit is achieved at some personal cost to those who believe that the church's current position is not adequate.
- As important as the issue of homosexuality is for the church, it is also important that we not lose sight of the church's larger mission to share the peace of Jesus Christ. This mission, and the call behind it, provides the unifying force that will help to hold us together as we sort out our differing points of view. If we focus only on the things that divide us, we will fail to find the unity we seek.

### **Affirmation of Values and Principles for the Future**

Although it is common for committees such as this one to provide a set of recommendations for action, we have chosen not to do so. It is not that we have no ideas, but rather we have concluded that there is no specific set of actions that will suddenly take away all of the disagreements about this issue that exist in the church today. Instead, we suggest the following values and principles to lead us into a future of mission and further learning about the meaning of love and community in the world.

### **Values**

1. The church continues to value the inestimable worth of each person. Some of us would, therefore, say that lack of love, acceptance, and tolerance for all persons is immoral. Yet others of us would say that homosexual behaviors are inherently immoral; those who engage in them are to be loved but not fully accepted in our congregations and/or sacraments. Let us remember that God's love is deeper than we can imagine, and we are challenged to learn how to extend compassion and kindness to all.
2. All of us stand in need of redemption, regardless of our sexual orientation and regardless of whether or not we have been ordained. The church must make judgments about the conditions those called to priesthood office must meet, but we do not make these judgments with clean hands. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Regardless of whether we believe that those involved in homosexual activity should be ordained or not, we each arrive at our conclusion as a fallen person who is in need of God's grace and forgiveness.
3. We value the teachings and healing ministry of Jesus Christ as the example of how we should live our lives. The gospel of Jesus Christ addresses a broad range of human nature and experience. Although refraining from homosexual activity is seen as a fundamental characteristic of Christian discipleship in many societies, for some societies and

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individuals this is not the case. However, care should be exercised in our denominational deliberations, lest this one issue overshadow all other concerns in carrying out the mission of the church.

4. We trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to both unite and transform us. Although we must extend our own efforts toward unity, we cannot achieve this goal through our abilities alone. It is God who unites us through the gospel. And it is the Holy Spirit who transforms us, if we work to discern the Spirit's guidance.

### Principles

1. The church's disagreement about the issue of homosexuality is an example of the church's woundedness. We seek to share in a community in which all disagreements have peaceful outcomes, in which every person feels loved and accepted, and in which the gospel is always shared clearly, compassionately, and without distortion. We recognize that this does not always happen in our life together, and the church depends on the mutual forgiveness of its members, as well as the grace and mercy of God.

2. The best way to address our differences is to express them openly and clearly with respect and caring for those who hold a different point of view. We cannot hide from the things that divide us. Rather, we must continually be about the process of reconciling ministry with each other. We seek to be a better example of the gospel than we currently are.

3. We currently lack unity regarding the issue of homosexuality and other issues, so we depend on mutual forgiveness and forbearance. Our current policies and procedures are hurtful to some members with regard to many issues, so we must express loving care toward each other.

4. This issue raises significant questions about how the Community of Christ can best reach decisions on such matters. It pushes us to grapple more seriously with how we discern God's will, how we reach consensus, how we best organize ourselves to do the work of the church around the world.

5. It will be difficult for the church to move beyond the 2002 statement of the World Church Leadership Council titled "Community, Common Consent, and the Issue of Homosexuality." This is not because we see the statement as being fully adequate; it is not. For those who feel that the church needs a more inclusive policy, the 2002 statement simply keeps long-standing provisions in place, albeit with explicit references to the worth of all persons. At the same time, many feel that this statement is too tentative and does not appear to take a firm stand on the issue of homosexuality; it simply states what we will do for now. We rely on the love and forgiveness of God and each other to help us move forward from this point.

6. We can feel encouraged that we have been able to address such a topic as openly and directly as we have. We are in the minority of Christian denominations in the world that have engaged the topic seriously. That is a prophetic response by the church. We must do

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better, but we have taken important steps through creating a study committee, exploring the issues, and adopting the Listening Circles approach as a caring and respectful way to deal with controversy among us.

### **Moving into the Future**

We have learned these things

*...about becoming a Zion community:*

- It is difficult to live up to our goals and dreams of being community and of finding unity in our diversity when an issue like homosexuality comes to the fore in the life of the church. We are called to establish Zion, or Christ-centered community. We believe that, with God's guidance and grace, we can be transformed into this kind of community. Yet we see that we have important things to learn about how to live in peaceful community amid diversity and varying viewpoints.
- We must continue to learn about being an international, multicultural community of Christ. An international church such as ours will find it increasingly difficult to legislate around specific matters of morality, ethics, or differences in national law or viewpoint.

Some feel that passing local or national legislation on such matters, rather than addressing them at a World Church level, may be a way to resolve controversial or culturally different issues such as homosexuality. That option is worth exploring, but the experience of denominations such as the Anglican Communion raises serious questions about whether that is a helpful solution.

- We must develop new skills related to listening and loving despite different viewpoints and develop new convictions about tolerance and unity that will help us remain in community, even when serious matters of difference are the reality in which we live. Moral and ethical dilemmas and differences in perspective will never leave us. The next one is already here or just beyond our horizon. Will we let it divide us, or destroy us? Or will our mutual listening and deliberations bring us new life and growth? Can we express our views with passion and clarity, but listen to another perspective or experience with compassion? Can we partake wholeheartedly of the symbols of the life and blood of Christ with a person who holds a view at the other end of the spectrum from ours? Or will we back away from God's call to faithfulness and community? Progress on the road to Zion may best be measured by how we listen to one another, come to consensus, and act in faith when we are facing matters of controversy and potential divisiveness.
- The values of Christ and our church must guide our decisions and our daily lives in community. Church leaders have been unequivocal in declaration of our Christ-modeled belief in the worth of all persons. Those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered (GLBT) should sense that principle in any congregation in which they participate. Though this is not yet a realized fact, it still remains a stated goal.

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- There are a small but significant number of members who are homosexual and who want to work and serve and have fellowship in the Community of Christ. There are many family and friends of GLBT members who hurt deeply when their loved ones do not feel they can participate fully in the life of the church. For some, the pain has been so great that they can no longer participate. Others have chosen, at least for now, to stay, to educate, to be patient, to hope, and to work for change in the foreseeable future.

### *...about discernment, consensus, and issues of theology:*

- Discernment of God's will, especially on controversial matters, is far more difficult than those who have it "all figured out" would lead us to believe. Persons of equal sincerity, equal compassion, and similar levels of information/education about an issue can and do reach very different conclusions about what they understand to be God's will.
- Deliberation about controversial issues and varying perceptions of God's will has sometimes pushed us to analyze more carefully what common consent is and how we achieve it. We continue the generational challenge of finding the balance between the role of the prophet and the role of a prophetic people. We will need to continue to explore what theocratic democracy means for our day and how it should function when dealing with matters such as homosexuality and priesthood.
- Matters related to homosexuality and the priesthood have also pushed us to think more deeply about how we interpret scripture about marriage, priesthood, spirituality, and human sexuality. We have been forced to address very complex questions: questions about God's love, humanity, tolerance, faith, and the sacraments. Most of this seeking is good, leading to growth, but it is uncomfortable and painful at times.
- An emerging "way forward" may be through finding common ground around issues of life and death such as poverty, war, and the well-being of children. This is not completely satisfactory, as it has potential to allow us to turn from people in our midst who are hurting deeply, and to turn from our own fears and unexamined selves. Yet it does remind us that a world church that spends most of the week of its Conference addressing homosexuality without facing the prophetic imperative to speak and act about poverty, at-risk children, and the implications of war on the planet, is backing away from even deeper global injustices.

### *...about Listening Circles and the process of accepting one another, though with differing viewpoints:*

- Virtually every person who has participated in a Listening Circle has had a positive experience (no matter their stance on the topic of homosexuality and priesthood). We are not aware of anyone who has participated in a Listening Circle leaving the church; rather, we believe that those who participate find many things in common with other circle participants, strengthening ties to each other and the church, despite differences on the topic. On the downside, actually getting local members to participate has been difficult. After all the effort to select and

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train people, the number of Listening Circles that have been formed has been minimal throughout the church.

- As an international church with varying cultural contexts, legal systems, and societal issues, the use of Listening Circles and similar approaches to listening and loving one another is a challenge we will face as we go forward in community.

After our study and consideration of the issues related to homosexuality in the church, we would hope for

- ongoing dialogue and careful listening to one another;
- extending Listening Circles and other appropriate tools into nations throughout the church;
- prayerful consideration for each one of us, along the continuum of our differing viewpoints;
- intentional seeking to discern God's will and the leading of the Holy Spirit as to how to best proceed as a loving community of Christ.

### *Committee on Homosexuality in the Church, 2004–2007*

David Brock, Council of Twelve, chair

Robert Clothier, Human Sexuality Task Force

Don Compier, dean of Community of Christ Seminary, Standing High Council

Chris Davidon, member-at-large

Ellen Frye, Human Sexuality Task Force

Sandee Gamet, World Church peacebuilding specialist

William C. Kramer, Standing High Council

Robert Kyser, president of Seventy (served until 9/'06)

Bruce Lindgren, World Church secretary

Pam Mayfield, GALA Board and member-at-large

Kathy D. Robinson, Standing High Council

Kevin Williams, Graceland University student (served until 5/'06)

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APPENDIX F

**Letter by First Presidency on May 22, 2009 distributed to all pastors  
and priesthood members**

Dear Colleagues,

A growing number of nations, states, and provinces have begun to allow same-sex marriage. Others are considering it. Consequently, the First Presidency has received several inquiries about whether Community of Christ ministers may officiate in same-sex marriages in places where it is legal.

Obviously, this is a complex issue, with leaders and members of the church holding a great diversity of opinion. It is our hope that this communication will clarify the church's position for the present time.

The First Presidency, in consultation with other World Church leaders and the Standing High Council, is considering what the most-helpful process may be for engaging the church in a consideration of issues about church policy and homosexuality. We believe the only way to move through such a process with integrity is to continue to abide by the church's policies and procedures as long as they are in place. Three of the most significant documents informing the church's policy on marriage are World Conference Resolution 1182, Doctrine and Covenants 111, and the section in the "Administrator's Handbook, 2005 Edition" on "Legal Elements of Marriage and Termination of Marriage," point #4, page 59.

World Conference Resolution 1182 repeatedly uses language referring to marriage as being between a husband and wife. The "Church Administrator's Handbook" states on page 59:

**The language of WCR 1182 does not provide authorization for ministers of the Community of Christ to perform marriages between two persons of the same sex, even in jurisdictions where such marriages are legally valid. The resolution does, however, provide for the recognition of legally valid marriages. Thus, a same-sex marriage may be entered into the church records as a legal fact, just as in other instances where the church recognizes legally valid marriages that it may not choose to solemnize.**

Doctrine and Covenants 111 refers to marriage as being between a man and a woman. Though Doctrine and Covenants 111 is not a revelatory statement, its preface states that "the church knows no other law of marriage than that which is set forth here."

In summary, no language in these guiding documents provides for same-sex marriage. To allow Community of Christ priesthood to officiate in same-sex marriages, when our policy does not allow it, during a time in which the church still is sorting through this

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divisive issue, would only cause further division and reduce participation in the discussion process.

As stated above, the First Presidency believes the only way to engage with integrity and fairness in church-wide discussions on this difficult issue is to abide by the policies of the church as long as they are officially in place, even if the policies themselves are under debate. Consequently, we want to be clear that Community of Christ priesthood members are not authorized by the church to officiate in same-sex marriages, even where it is legal to do so.

It is the responsibility of all church officers, staff, pastors, and priesthood to be aware of and adhere to church policies pertaining to this issue. Presiding officers and mission center leaders, please provide this information to all pastors and priesthood in your areas of responsibility.

We understand that this communication will be greeted warmly by some and will be frustrating to others. Still, we believe it is vital for us to consistently honor the current policies as stated by the World Conference and interpreted by World Church leaders.

Please be assured of our heartfelt appreciation for your ministry and leadership, especially as we deal with difficult matters that touch us all.

In Christ's Peace,  
The First Presidency

CC: Standing High Council

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## APPENDIX G

### Talking Points for Communications About Same-Sex Marriage Policy

- We are acutely aware of the pain and frustration of individuals and groups who view same-sex marriage from various personal, scriptural, theological, legal, and sacramental perspectives. Matters of human sexuality are so deeply imbedded in our individual, social, and cultural identities that it is difficult for people to separate examination of related issues from their underlying sense of self. Because preserving one's sense of self-identity is a fundamental need of human beings, consideration of human sexuality, homosexuality, and same-sex marriage issues easily becomes emotionally charged and conflicted. Further, consideration of such issues in an international community of faith, with the added complexities of diverse customs and languages, must be done with great care, understanding, and sensitivity.
- Direction in the life of the church emerges through the interaction of scripture, tradition, prophetic guidance, knowledge, and discernment. This interaction occurs in an international faith community with diverse cultural perspectives. Intercultural critique of proposed direction is an important part of this process. It's often overlooked by those who hold strong opinions on certain issues, especially if they are from the traditionally dominant, individualistic (Western) cultures of the church. Some international church leaders are greatly concerned the dominant cultures of the church will decide the question of same-sex marriage and related issues without adequately considering their voices and perspectives.
- The Expanded World Church Leadership Council, after completing the *We Share* foundational statement, has begun to discuss "culturally respectful standards of conduct," including issues related to human sexuality and homosexuality. We have discovered in the council that it takes much patience, sensitivity, and effort to understand perspectives and to find common ground. For example, the word "homosexuality" has multiple meanings and connotations across cultures of the church. Also, in some nations, our ministers' well-being could be jeopardized if they are linked to a church body that holds positions on homosexuality contrary to governmental positions. These are just a few of the complexities we are dealing with.
- The first step in resolving difficult issues is to fix a common base of understanding about the current situation. The recent statement of the Presidency was in response to inquiries about the current policy and its background. It was not a new policy statement or a new interpretation. The statement was provided as information to the church because many were saying they did not know what the policy was.

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- In the same statement, the Presidency said the appropriate leadership bodies (Presidency, Standing High Council, World Church Leadership Council) are reviewing the policy in terms of adequacy for today's situations. These are the World Church leadership bodies that previously presented official statements on issues related to homosexuality.
- The Presidency's position is that the church needs to abide by current policy unless there is a change in policy. This is a matter of leadership integrity, especially because of the 2002 WCLC statement, *Community, Common Consent, and Homosexuality*. That statement indicated in a related matter (homosexuality and ordination) there would not be further exceptions to the guidelines (policies) unless they are adjusted through the "common consent" of the people. The 2002 statement resulted from the reaction of the church to the comment by President W. Grant McMurray at the 2002 World Conference that the policy on homosexual ordination had been ignored by church officers in several instances.
- An important part of being in true international community is learning to talk about divisive issues without dividing. When one side thinks the other side has made up its mind and will do what it wants regardless of policies, it becomes difficult—if not impossible—to have meaningful discussion. Any change in the policy will need to occur through a process that incorporates healthy decision-making and "common consent" in community that is seen, regardless of the outcome, as fair by those who have different views.
- We are aware of legislation coming to World Conference about same-sex marriage. To preempt World Conference deliberation by allowing ministers in some parts of the world to ignore church policy would disenfranchise the World Conference from actions it may or may not choose to take.
- Also, to ignore the current policy creates a confusing administrative situation in the church. If some ministers are allowed to ignore the policy on same-sex marriage, then should others be allowed to ignore church policies they do not agree with?
- The World Church Human Sexuality Task Force is working on a "Sexual Ethic Statement" that will provide background and perspective for discussing many related issues.
- The church did not apply any pressure or assert any influence on Graceland University about its position on same-sex marriage. Graceland leadership chose to align with the current church policy about proposed same sex marriages to be performed by Community of Christ ministers.
- The church is involved in a prayer, discussion, and discernment process about "Conditions of Membership" in response to action by the World Conference. It is

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important that we focus on the fullest membership participation in this process, even as we begin to address other important issues.

- We have been counseled as a church to “Listen together to one another, without judgment or predisposition. Do not assume that the answers to matters of conflict have yet been perceived. There is much labor to be done. Reason together in love, and the Spirit of truth will prevail.” (Doctrine and Covenants 162:5c.)