

FAMILY FELLOWSHIP RESPONSE TO AN INTERVIEW WITH ELDER OAKS AND ELDER WICKMAN ON SAME GENDER ATTRACTION AS CONDUCTED BY THE CHURCH'S PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF IN AUGUST, 2006

Opening Statement

To members of Family Fellowship, it appears the questions and answers in this interview were designed to help families respond and relate to their gay and lesbian family members as well as to address homosexual Latter-day Saints themselves. We appreciate the effort to speak candidly and compassionately on this challenging issue. We especially appreciate the acceptance of sexual orientation as a core characteristic of persons, and the positions expressed on nature/nurture, therapy, caution in heterosexual marriage, and Christ's atonement.

Below are our responses to the statements made in the interview and our attempts to create a broader context for the on-going dialogue about this important subject.

This collective response from parents and other concerned Latter-day Saints is based on our personal experience in responding to and interacting with our own teenagers, young adults and other family members on these issues. Collectively, we have a deep commitment to the Church and extensive experience in dealing with homosexual issues in our families and congregations. We consider ourselves responsible Latter-day Saints who try to govern our lives by true principles and who seek inspiration regarding important matters concerning our families. We hope our experience in dealing with issues relating to homosexuality in our families will be taken seriously.

We have thoughtfully considered both the questions asked by the interviewer and the responses to them provided by Elders Oaks and Wickman. We offer our responses to the same questions in the hope that they will be helpful to Church leaders.

There are several things we would suggest at the

At the outset, can you explain why this whole issue of homosexuality and same-gender marriage is important to the Church?

ELDER OAKS: This is much bigger than just a question of whether or not society should be more tolerant of the homosexual **lifestyle**. Over past years we have seen unrelenting pressure from advocates of that lifestyle to accept as **normal** what is **not normal**, and to characterize those who disagree as narrow-minded, bigoted and unreasonable. Such advocates are quick to demand freedom of speech and thought for themselves, but equally quick to criticize those with a different view and, if possible, to silence them by applying labels like "homophobic." In at least one country where homosexual activists have won major concessions, we

outset. We have tried to avoid certain language, such as "affliction" and "abomination," or terms that are considered offensive by homosexuals and their families such as "gay-rights advocate" and "gay/homosexual lifestyle."

When our children confront their homosexuality, they have four choices: 1) remain celibate and be active in the Church, 2) enter high-risk heterosexual marriages, 3) live non-celibately without a permanent partner outside of the Church, or 4) live non-celibately in a committed relationship outside the church. Understandably, statements in the interview speak in favor only of the first possibility (and, under strictly specified guidelines, the second). However, most Latter-day Saint homosexuals, including a significant percentage of the children of the families in Family Fellowship, have rejected the first option. We as parents and other family members of homosexual Latter-day Saints have to face the reality that most choose one of the latter two options. All of us associated with this document favor the final option for those who do not choose celibacy or who choose not to enter high-risk marriages. In other words, we prefer our children to live in committed relationships with fidelity. We wonder how many other parents would choose differently when their children reject the first option.?

1. IMPORTANCE OF THIS ISSUE TO THE CHURCH

This issue is important to the Church for a number of reasons, including the tremendous pain and suffering over it experienced by a large number of LDS families. We want to reach out to those families and lighten their burden. We want to find a way to enfranchise rather than disenfranchise them and their homosexual family members. We want to diminish divisiveness and encourage loyalty to the Church. We want our gay members to know of our love for them and provide assurance that they are beloved sons and daughters of God, something that many of them doubt because of the treatment they have often received from both ecclesiastical leaders and lay members.

From all available information, there are far more LDS families than anyone had imagined who are experiencing significant pain and suffering over the

	<p>have even seen a church pastor threatened with prison for preaching from the pulpit that homosexual behavior is sinful. Given these trends, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints must take a stand on doctrine and principle. This is more than a social issue — ultimately it may be a test of our most basic religious freedoms to teach what we know our Father in Heaven wants us to teach.</p>	<p><i>discovery that a family member is homosexual. More assistance is needed to guide and support them in their efforts to come to terms with an unanticipated and poorly understood phenomenon that is becoming increasingly public.</i></p> <p><i>We think it is more constructive not to speak of one side of the debate/dialogue about homosexuality as “having an agenda.” We prefer to keep the dialogue in the middle where the motive is focused more on understanding than on proving a position.</i></p> <p><i>In reality, there is considerable pressure to conform to the heterosexual norm. The pressure for homosexuals to conform to a heterosexual “life” has proven unhealthy to many of our children who have married or attempted marriage while attempting to ignore their feelings of attraction to the same gender. In some instances this has led to suicide and to other familial and societal problems.</i></p> <p><i>It is important for Church leaders to understand that members seeking solutions to the issues relating to homosexuality do not consider themselves advocates of anything other than fair, open and honest treatment within ecclesiastical circles of their gay and lesbian loved ones and fair and equitable treatment under the law for personal and civil rights.</i></p> <p><i>We also prefer not to use words like “normal” and “not normal,” not because they may not be technically correct but because what is “not normal” or “abnormal” often carries connotations with darker implications, and also because “normal” is often culturally relative. Certainly, a near majority of Americans and Europeans did not consider nineteenth-century Mormon polygamy normal, even though Mormons considered it the highest form of marriage.</i></p> <p><i>We believe it is possible for the Church to hold to its doctrinal position with regard to homosexual behavior while at the same time treating its gay and lesbian members and their families with greater understanding, respect and charity.</i></p>
<p>Let’s say my 17-year-old son comes to talk to</p>	<p>ELDER OAKS: You’re my son. You will always be my son, and I’ll always be there to help you. The distinction</p>	<p>2. SON WITH SAME SEX ATTRACTION</p> <p><i>How a parent responds to a family member’s initial</i></p>

me and, after a great deal of difficulty trying to get it out, tells me that he believes that he's attracted to men — that he has no interest and never has had any interest in girls. He believes he's probably gay. He says that he's tried to suppress these feelings. He's remained celibate, but he realizes that his feelings are going to be devastating to the family because we've always talked about his Church mission, about his temple marriage and all those kinds of things. He just feels he can't live what he thinks is a lie any longer, and so he comes in this very upset and depressed manner. What do I tell him as a parent?

between feelings or inclinations on the one hand, and behavior on the other hand, is very clear. It's no sin to have inclinations that if yielded to would produce behavior that would be a transgression. The sin is in yielding to temptation. Temptation is not unique. Even the Savior was tempted. The New Testament affirms that God has given us commandments that are difficult to keep. It is in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 13: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." I think it's important for you to understand that homosexuality, which you've spoken of, is not a noun that describes a condition. It's an adjective that describes feelings or behavior. I encourage you, as you struggle with these challenges, not to think of yourself as a 'something' or 'another,' except that you're a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and you're my son, and that you're struggling with challenges. Everyone has some challenges they have to struggle with. You've described a particular kind of challenge that is very vexing. It is common in our society and it has also become politicized. But it's only one of a host of challenges men and women have to struggle with, and I just encourage you to seek the help of the Savior to resist temptation and to refrain from behavior that would cause you to have to repent or to have your Church membership called into question.

personal disclosure or "coming out" is critical. As demonstrated here by Elder Oaks, the first response should always be an affirmation of love and an expression of concern that the son or daughter has had to try to figure out how to deal with this attraction on his or her own in what is often an unfriendly or even hostile family, church and societal environment. The parent should listen carefully to what his child's experience has been and try to respond sensitively. In other words, the focus should be on listening and love.

We are concerned about an emphasis on sin and condemnation. This first interaction will undoubtedly be followed by numerous other conversations that should be as constructive as possible. In the vast majority of cases, the homosexual child has heard the condemnation of homosexuality as sin so loudly and frequently that there will be no doubt how it is regarded. It is often the very fear of sin and its consequences, including condemnation and rejection, that prevents most homosexuals from disclosing their orientation to their families and ecclesiastical leaders.

We feel parents should make it clear that neither they nor Church leaders have all the answers, but that they are willing to help their child fashion an appropriate response to this condition that has the best chance to provide long term happiness.

If there is evidence of serious or clinical depression or if suicidal tendencies are present or suspected, professional guidance should be sought. Above all else, the child should be reassured of his or her worth to God, to the Church and to his/her family.

We do agree that over time, just as one would encourage a heterosexual teen-ager to resist sexual temptation and behavior not in keeping with Church standards, so should the parent of a homosexual teen-ager do the same. On the other hand, just as one should continue loving and nurturing a heterosexual child who chooses to live beyond the bounds of Church standards, so one should accord the same to a homosexual child who makes a similar choice.

Most dictionaries categorize "homosexuality" as a noun that describes a person's sexual orientation to someone of the same gender. If our children have persistent, long standing attractions which are

labeled as “certainly a core characteristic of any person,” we feel it matters little whether these feelings are described as a noun or an adjective. It is not possible to make the feelings go away regardless of what we call it. That is the real issue.

If somebody has a very powerful heterosexual drive, there is the opportunity for marriage. If a young man thinks he’s gay, what we’re really saying to him is that there is simply no other way to go but to **be celibate for the rest of his life if he doesn’t feel any attraction to women?**

ELDER OAKS: That is exactly the same thing we say to the many members who don’t have the opportunity to marry. We expect celibacy of any person that is not married.

ELDER WICKMAN: We live in a society which is so saturated with sexuality that it perhaps is more troublesome now, because of that fact, for a person to look beyond their gender orientation to other aspects of who they are. I think I would say to your son or anyone that was so **afflicted** to strive to expand your horizons beyond simply gender orientation. Find fulfillment in the many other facets of your character and your personality and your nature that extend beyond that. **There’s no denial that one’s gender orientation is certainly a core characteristic of any person**, but it’s not the only one. What’s more, merely having inclinations does not disqualify one for any aspect of Church participation or membership, except possibly marriage as has already been talked about. But even that, in the fullness of life as we understand it through the doctrines of the restored gospel, eventually can become possible. In this life,

3. CELIBACY AS A LIFE CHOICE

The most important part of this response, in our estimation, is the acknowledgment that sexual orientation, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is a “core characteristic” of personality. We are extremely grateful that this is included and we are hopeful that from this time forward more and more leaders and members of the Church will comprehend the importance of this fact.

Almost all humans, especially in their early adult lives, have strong God-given sexual desires. As with attraction for the opposite sex, when these-desires are deeply felt for someone of the same sex, abstinence and control constitute significant challenges. However, celibacy becomes a greater challenge for homosexuals because heterosexuals generally see it as a temporary requirement whereas for homosexuals who wish to remain active in the Church it is an ultimate or life-long requirement. And while heterosexuals may enjoy affectionate, romantic, non-sexual relationships for the duration of their single lives, according to current Church teachings such an option is not open to homosexuals. That is, physically affectionate experiences that are characterized by romantic or erotic desire, which are at the core of heterosexual companionship and which psychologists and sociologists see as fundamental for full human development under most circumstances, are categorically denied to homosexuals. In other words, we believe that families need to acknowledge that homosexuals are asked to sacrifice a part of their human experience that the near majority of heterosexuals, even in the Church, not only are not

such things as service in the Church, including missionary service, all of this is available to anyone who is true to covenants and commandments.

asked to but likely would refuse to sacrifice. Church service, as fulfilling as it is, is not a substitute for intimate companionship.

As parents we recognize that at a certain point in their teen years young people become aware of and begin to explore their sexual feelings, hopefully in morally and socially responsible ways. Although it is normal for young people to have close friends of both genders, some become aware of strong attraction to those of their own gender. Since there is little to be gained by denying or ignoring these feelings, we feel the best strategy is to create a context in which our children can honestly evaluate the degree of their same-sex feelings.

If they are bisexual and have feelings for both sexes, they can perhaps learn to suppress their same gender feelings in favor of their opposite-gender feelings. If they have little or no sexual feelings for the opposite sex, they face a much more difficult decision.

It is the experience of most active LDS parents of homosexual children that when forced to choose between the church and an intimate relationship with a same sex partner, sooner or later those children almost overwhelmingly choose the relationship.

While some Latter-day Saint families disown or become estranged from their homosexual children living in committed relationships, an increasing number are welcoming such children and their partners and children into the family circle.

How the Church responds to homosexual members whose relationship is sanctioned by either legal marriages or civil partnerships (for example in Massachusetts, Canada, and in certain countries in Europe) is another matter altogether and one that Church leadership has not yet, to our knowledge, fully addressed. We think there should be a way for the Church to reach out to such couples, many of whom are children of faithful LDS members and who have themselves served missions and held responsible church positions and given significant Church service. We believe such Latter-day Saints, if given the opportunity, have the potential to bless those around them. Rather than excluded we would like to see them included and made welcome in our worship services and church community.

So you are saying that homosexual feelings are controllable?

ELDER OAKS: Yes, homosexual feelings are controllable. Perhaps there is an inclination or susceptibility to such feelings that is a reality for some and not a reality for others. But out of such susceptibilities come feelings, and feelings are controllable. If we cater to the feelings, they increase the power of the temptation. If we yield to the temptation, we have committed sinful behavior. That pattern is the same for a person that covets someone else's property and has a strong temptation to steal. It's the same for a person that develops a taste for alcohol. It's the same for a person that is born with a 'short fuse,' as we would say of a susceptibility to anger. If they let that susceptibility remain uncontrolled, it becomes a feeling of anger, and a feeling of anger can yield to behavior that is sinful and illegal. We're not talking about a unique challenge here. We're talking about a common condition of mortality. We don't understand exactly the 'why,' or the extent to which there are inclinations or susceptibilities and so on. But what we do know is that feelings can be controlled and behavior can be controlled. The line of sin is between the feelings and the behavior. The line of prudence is between the susceptibility and the feelings. We need to lay hold on the feelings and try to control them to keep us from getting into a circumstance

4. THE NATURE OF HOMOSEXUAL FEELINGS

For whatever reason, we are all naturally attracted to others, some to opposite some to same sex persons. We agree that what is controllable, that is, subject to individual agency, is the natural extension of a sexual attraction or feeling to a sexual act. In other words, scientists tell us that whether heterosexual or homosexual, we are hard-wired to have sexual desire and therefore to have sexual feelings. We can choose to sublimate, channel or magnify such feelings, but as noted, most such susceptibilities come unbidden. Thus, when we say that a person "controls" his feelings, we usually mean that he does not "act" on those feelings. We don't mean that he no longer has those feelings

Whether this orientation is inborn or learned, the fact remains that it is pretty much an established part of being by the time we are teen-agers and young adults, if not before.

All of us can learn how to overcome or control certain feelings and behaviors that are detrimental to social, psychological and spiritual wellbeing.

While we don't understand the full nature of homosexuality, we feel that it seems to be a more complex, deeply-ingrained part of a person's character than a tendency toward irritability or dishonesty, both of which have negative associations.

Whether we understand the genesis of homosexuality or not, and whether it is more serious in nature than other "feelings," we nevertheless agree with the focus here in that we are all required to learn to control our sexual appetites whether heterosexual or otherwise and whether married or not, in order to abide by the laws of church and state.

	<p>that leads to sinful behavior.</p> <p>ELDER WICKMAN: One of the great sophistries of our age, I think, is that merely because one has an inclination to do something, that therefore acting in accordance with that inclination is inevitable. That's contrary to our very nature as the Lord has revealed to us. We do have the power to control our behavior.</p>	
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<p>If we were to look back at someone who had a 'short fuse,' and we were to look at their parents who might have had a short fuse, some might identify a genetic influence in that.</p>	<p>ELDER OAKS: No, we do not accept the fact that conditions that prevent people from attaining their eternal destiny were born into them without any ability to control. That is contrary to the Plan of Salvation, and it is contrary to the justice and mercy of God. It's contrary to the whole teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which expresses the truth that by or through the power and mercy of Jesus Christ we will have the strength to do all things. That includes resisting temptation. That includes dealing with things that we're born with, including disfigurements, or mental or physical incapacities. None of these stand in the way of our attaining our eternal destiny. The same may be said of a susceptibility or inclination to one behavior or another which if yielded to would prevent us from achieving our eternal destiny.</p>	<p>5. IS A "SHORT FUSE" IN THE SAME CATEGORY AS SEXUAL ORIENTATION?</p> <p><i>As parents, a "short fuse" seems different to us than sexual orientation, which has a more profound and enduring effect.</i></p> <p><i>We have found that our homosexual children, as our heterosexual children, tend not to give up their quest for an enduring intimate relationship. We seriously doubt that most heterosexuals would choose to surrender all of their affectionate, romantic and erotic desires and plans for a family for a lifetime if church policy required it.</i></p>
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<p><i>You're saying the Church doesn't necessarily have a position on 'nurture or nature'</i></p>	<p>ELDER OAKS: That's where our doctrine comes into play. The Church does not have a position on the causes of any of these susceptibilities or inclinations, including those related to same-gender attraction. Those are scientific questions —</p>	<p>6. THE CHURCH HAS NO POSITION ON NATURE OR NURTURE AS A CAUSE</p> <p><i>Although some church leaders have at times stated otherwise, Elder Oaks' answer is in keeping with the statement by President Hinckley that makes it very</i></p>
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	<p>whether nature or nurture — those are things the Church doesn't have a position on.</p> <p>ELDER WICKMAN: Whether it is nature or nurture really begs the important question, and a preoccupation with nature or nurture can, it seems to me, lead someone astray from the principles that Elder Oaks has been describing here. Why somebody has a same-gender attraction... who can say? But what matters is the fact that we know we can control how we behave, and it is behavior which is important.</p>	<p><i>clear that he does not know whether sexual orientation is a learned or inherited human trait. We are extremely grateful that this statement does not deny, like a certain <u>Ensign</u> article by Byrd (September, 1999), that homosexuality may have a genetic origin.</i></p> <p><i>The question as to the origin or base cause(s) of homosexuality is neither idle nor trivial. Elder Oaks acknowledges that questions of cause are “scientific questions.” Regarding such science, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that at the very least homosexuality has biological roots that lie beyond volition and are most likely immutable.</i></p> <p><i>Whatever role nature or nurture plays in creating the homosexual condition, what is indisputable to the vast majority of homosexuals and those who love and care about them is that it is not a changeable condition, any more than heterosexuality is.</i></p> <p><i>The recent neutral position on nature/nurture taken by certain Church leaders is encouraging. However, many of our children continue to feel judged in our Mormon community by those who feel that homosexuals choose their sexual orientation and can change or adjust it if they would only choose to do so.</i></p> <p><i>Some of us hear from our fellow saints that homosexuality had its origins in nurture or that it was caused by specific factors (e.g., by inadequate parenting, selfishness, etc.). Thankfully, this statement clarifies that the Church does not have a fixed position on the issue of nature or nurture.</i></p>
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<p>Is therapy of any kind a legitimate course of action if we're talking about controlling behavior? If a young man says, “Look, I really want these feelings to go away... I would do anything</p>	<p>ELDER WICKMAN: Well, it may be appropriate for that person to seek therapy. Certainly the Church doesn't counsel against that kind of therapy. But from the standpoint of a parent counseling a person, or a Church leader counseling a person, or a person looking at his or her same-gender attraction from the standpoint of 'What can I do</p>	<p>7. SEEKING TREATMENT IS A MATTER OF INDIVIDUAL CHOICE</p> <p><i>In a departure from previous positions, Church leaders here state that therapy cannot be expected to alter sexual orientation and they do not endorse any particular therapy of this type. This is a welcome clarification.</i></p> <p><i>Elder Wickman states, “Studies . . . have shown that in</i></p>
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for these feelings to go away,” is it legitimate to look at clinical therapy of some sort that would address those issues?

about it here that’s in keeping with gospel teachings?’ the clinical side of it is not what matters most. What matters most is recognition that ‘I have my own will. I have my own agency. I have the power within myself to control what I do.’ Now, that’s not to say it’s not appropriate for somebody with that **affliction** to seek appropriate clinical help to examine whether in his or her case there’s something that can be done about it. This is an issue that those in psychiatry, in the psychology professions have debated. Case studies I believe have shown that in some cases there has been progress made in helping someone to change that orientation; in other cases not. From the Church’s standpoint, from our standpoint of concern for people, that’s not where we place our principal focus. It’s on these other matters.

ELDER OAKS: Amen to that. Let me just add one more thought. The Church rarely takes a position on which treatment techniques are appropriate, for medical doctors or for psychiatrists or psychologists and so on. The second point is that there are abusive practices that have been used in connection with various mental attitudes or feelings. Over-medication in respect to depression is an example that comes to mind. The aversive therapies that have been used in connection with same-sex attraction have contained some serious abuses that have been recognized over time within the professions. While we have no position about what the medical doctors do (except in very, very rare cases — abortion would be such an example), we are conscious that there are abuses and we don’t accept responsibility for those

some cases there has been progress made in helping someone to change that [homosexual] orientation; in other cases not,” but to our knowledge there have been no reliable, long-term, scientifically-controlled studies that suggest therapy can make the feelings go away. While some therapists and the Evergreen support group, among others, have used isolated cases or limited populations to argue general principles, their conclusions have not been well received by the scientific community.

It is important to note that no constructive therapeutic treatment will make healthy, appropriate homosexual feelings “go away” any more than they would be successful in making similar heterosexual feelings go away. Many sexual feelings are spontaneous and unbidden and are thus inextricably part of being and cannot be eradicated (even if it were possible) without serious psychological and spiritual damage.

Seeking therapy for inappropriate, obsessive or maladaptive sexual feelings is appropriate for homosexuals just as it is for heterosexuals. But sexual orientation is a core characteristic of a person and not by its nature obsessive or maladaptive.

LDS Family Services personnel have tracked over 800 cases of LDS married and unmarried males (see www.ldsresources.info) who have sought therapy to “cure” or cope with their same-sex attraction. In the vast majority of cases the feelings still persist. We know that for years such reorientation and reparative therapies have been recommended at BYU and at LDS Family Services wherein persons were promised a “transition out of homosexuality”, but in the vast majority of cases this has not happened. In rare cases when those with homosexual attraction have been able to establish successful marriages these individuals have been bisexual.

We are extremely pleased the Church is moving away from the endorsement of these therapies. Elder Oaks seems to recognize that the Church can easily end up being complicit in abusive therapy practices if the Church endorses them in any way.

	<p>abuses. Even though they are addressed at helping people we would like to see helped, we can't endorse every kind of technique that's been used.</p>	
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<p>Is heterosexual marriage ever an option for those with homosexual feelings?</p>	<p>ELDER OAKS: We are sometimes asked about whether marriage is a remedy for these feelings that we have been talking about. President Hinckley, faced with the fact that apparently some had believed it to be a remedy, and perhaps that some Church leaders had even counseled marriage as the remedy for these feelings, made this statement: "Marriage should not be viewed as a therapeutic step to solve problems such as homosexual inclinations or practices." To me that means that we are not going to stand still to put at risk daughters of God who would enter into such marriages under false pretenses or under a cloud unknown to them. Persons who have this kind of challenge that they cannot control could not enter marriage in good faith. On the other hand, persons who have cleansed themselves of any transgression and who have shown their ability to deal with these feelings or inclinations and put them in the background, and feel a great attraction for a daughter of God and therefore desire to enter marriage and have children and enjoy the blessings of eternity — that's a situation when marriage would be appropriate. President Hinckley said that marriage is not a therapeutic step to solve problems.</p>	<p>8. CAUTION RECOMMENDED FOR HETEROSEXUAL MARRIAGE</p> <p><i>This is indeed a positive and welcome clarification, especially in light of counsel given by many church leaders over the years that marriage is or might be a solution for homosexuals. We know of many who have received such advice from their leaders, often with unfortunate consequences. It is important to acknowledge that such counsel continues to be given by some leaders.</i></p> <p><i>We have felt for some time that in addition to President Hinckley's statement, there needs to be a strong statement about protecting the "daughters of God." Therefore, this statement by Elder Oaks should be stressed throughout the Church since men comprise about 90% of those who come to Church-affiliated support sources for help with same sex feelings and almost half of them are already married.</i></p> <p><i>However, we should not overlook the fact that many sons of God have also been hurt by well meaning homosexual young women desperate to have a companion and bear children. Such women have entered into marriage with a heterosexual partner (often at the urging and counsel of ecclesiastical leaders and Family Services therapists) believing that their same-sex feelings would either diminish or vanish. Generally, such women discover too late that heterosexual marriage is in fact not an appropriate choice for them.</i></p> <p><i>We interpret the idea that persons with same-sex feelings can "put them in the background" and experience "great attraction" means that some bisexuals may be able to establish and successfully sustain marriages. In our experience, however, most homosexual young adults who feel they cannot marry someone of the opposite sex are not bisexual, and</i></p>
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		<p><i>therefore do not have the potential to feel a stronger "great attraction" for the opposite sex than for their own gender.</i></p> <p><i>What makes marriage problematic is that many homosexuals, feeling that their only options are celibacy or marriage, may convince themselves that they can generate strong enough attraction for the opposite sex to form a successful marriage. Also, many heterosexual young women, especially those in their late twenties and early thirties, may feel that their only chance of marriage and children lies in marrying a homosexual man, regardless of the risks. Unfortunately, the success or failure of such convictions are generally known only after marriage, with often tragic consequence for those involved.</i></p>
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	<p>ELDER WICKMAN: One question that might be asked by somebody who is struggling with same-gender attraction is, "Is this something I'm stuck with forever? What bearing does this have on eternal life? If I can somehow make it through this life, when I appear on the other side, what will I be like?"</p> <p>Gratefully, the answer is that same-gender attraction did not exist in the pre-earth life and neither will it exist in the next life. It is a circumstance that for whatever reason or reasons seems to apply right now in mortality, in this nano-second of our eternal existence. The good news for somebody who is struggling with same-gender attraction is this: 1) It is that 'I'm not stuck with it forever.' It's just now. Admittedly, for each one of us, it's hard to look beyond the 'now' sometimes. But nonetheless, if you see mortality as now, it's only during this season. 2) If I can keep myself worthy here, if I can be true to gospel commandments, if I can keep covenants that I have made, the blessings of</p>	<p>9. SAME SEX ATTRACTION IS A MORTAL CONDITION ONLY</p> <p><i>We are puzzled by this because many of us feel that "same spirit" could mean sexual orientation. Alma teaches that the "same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world."</i></p> <p><i>As parents we know that a fullness of joy in the next life for some men will involve having more than one wife and celestial glory can also be granted to single "ministering angels." It seems, then, that there is actually considerable variety in the next life.</i></p> <p><i>However, our greatest concern as parents is the implied suggestion here that those with homosexual orientation are fundamentally flawed and this shames our children rather than bringing them to God.</i></p>
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	<p>exaltation and eternal life that Heavenly Father holds out to all of His children apply to me. Every blessing — including eternal marriage — is and will be mine in due course.</p> <p>ELDER OAKS: Let me just add a thought to that. There is no fullness of joy in the next life without a family unit, including a husband, a wife, and posterity. Further, men are that they might have joy. In the eternal perspective, same-gender activity will only bring sorrow and grief and the loss of eternal opportunities.</p>	
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<p>A little earlier, Elder Oaks, you talked about the same standard of morality for heterosexuals and homosexuals. How would you address someone who said to you, ‘I understand it’s the same standard, but aren’t we asking a little more of someone who has same-gender attraction?’</p> <p>Obviously there are heterosexual people who won’t get married, but would you accept that they at least have hope that ‘tomorrow I could meet the person of my dreams.’ There’s always the hope that that could happen at</p>	<p>ELDER OAKS: There are differences, of course, but the contrast is not unique. There are people with physical disabilities that prevent them from having any hope — in some cases any actual hope and in other cases any practical hope — of marriage. The circumstance of being currently unable to marry, while tragic, is not unique. It is sometimes said that God could not discriminate against individuals in this circumstance. But life is full of physical infirmities that some might see as discriminations — total paralysis or serious mental impairment being two that are relevant to marriage. If we believe in God and believe in His mercy and His justice, it won’t do to say that these are discriminations because God wouldn’t discriminate. We are in no condition to judge what discrimination is. We rest on</p>	<p>10. CELIBACY IS DIFFICULT BUT NOT UNIQUE TO HOMOSEXUALS</p> <p><i>We appreciate the fact that Elder Oaks recognizes the tragedy of a life without hope of marriage and family. As parents, we do not consider it a sign of self absorption when persons desire an intimate life. If there are those who can live without it, and wish to maintain their Church membership, then the answer here may be of some help to them.</i></p> <p><i>To ask our LDS young adult children of same sex orientation to accept celibacy is to impose an enormous burden on them. Yet it is a dilemma given current official pronouncements in which all possibility of same sex marriage is categorically excluded, and in which unmarried sexual liaisons frequently result in excommunication. When forced to make a decision, it is now obvious that young homosexuals are overwhelmingly choosing to leave the Church in spite of their strong identification with and desire to be affiliated with it. This loss is a tragedy, for the individuals, their families, and for the Church itself.</i></p> <p><i>While some relatively few individuals, including those who are asexual or who have low libido, or those with</i></p>
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any point in their life. Someone with same-gender attraction wouldn't necessarily have that same hope.

our faith in God and our utmost assurance of His mercy and His love for all of His children.

ELDER WICKMAN: There's really no question that there is an anguish associated with the inability to marry in this life. We feel for someone that has that anguish. I feel for somebody that has that anguish. But it's not limited to someone who has same-gender attraction. We live in a very self-absorbed age. I guess it's naturally human to think about my own problems as somehow greater than someone else's. I think when any one of us begins to think that way, it might be well be to look beyond ourselves. Who am I to say that I am more handicapped, or suffering more, than someone else? I happen to have a handicapped daughter. She's a beautiful girl. She'll be 27 next week. Her name is Courtney. Courtney will never marry in this life, yet she looks wistfully upon those who do. She will stand at the window of my office which overlooks the Salt Lake Temple and look at the brides and their new husbands as they're having their pictures taken. She's at once captivated by it and saddened because Courtney understands that will not be her experience here. Courtney didn't ask for the circumstances into which she was born in this life, any more than somebody with same-gender attraction did. So there are lots of kinds of anguish people can have, even associated with just this matter of marriage. What we look forward to, and the great promise of the gospel, is that whatever our inclinations are here, whatever our shortcomings are here, whatever the hindrances to our enjoying a fullness of joy here, we have the Lord's assurance for

extraordinary levels of self discipline, choose to forsake sexual intimacy for life, this is the exception rather than the rule.

In fact, the contrast between homosexuals and heterosexuals is significant. While it is true that some heterosexuals may choose not to marry or by life circumstances are unable to in spite of the wish to do so, the vast majority have at least the hope of marriage and, beyond this, have the opportunity for romantic and affectionate relationships; in fact such relationships are encouraged by the Church and by families. According to present Church policy, however, such homosexual relationships, even if non-sexual, are not approved (see the recently revised BYU standards statement). In addition, heterosexuals who transgress the law of chastity, who enter into co-habiting relationships, or even who bear children out of wedlock, are often fellowshipped by church leaders and members, often without any disciplinary action being taken against them. In general, homosexuals do not enjoy such considerations.

Many of our homosexual children consider it demeaning for others to speak of their condition in the same terms one speaks of physical or mental disabilities or disorders. Being physically or mentally incapable of marriage is different from being physically and mentally capable of marriage and yet be denied that experience.

every one of us that those in due course will be removed. We just need to remain faithful.

Elder Wickman, when you referred earlier to missionary service, you held that out as a possibility for someone who felt same-gender attraction but didn't act on it. President Hinckley has said that if people are faithful, they can essentially go forward as anyone else in the Church and have full fellowship. What does that really mean? Does it mean missionary service? Does it mean that someone can go to the temple, at least for those sacraments that don't involve marriage? **Does it really mean that someone with same-gender attraction so long as they're faithful, has every opportunity to participate, to be called to service, to do all those kinds of things that anyone else can?**

ELDER WICKMAN: I think the short answer to that is yes! I'd look to Elder Oaks to elaborate on that.

ELDER OAKS: President Hinckley has helped us on that subject with a clear statement that answers all questions of that nature. He said, "We love them (referring to people who have same-sex attractions) as sons and daughters of God. They may have certain inclinations which are powerful and which may be difficult to control. If they do not act upon these inclinations, then they can go forward as do all other members of the Church. "To me that means that a person with these inclinations, where they're kept under control, or, if yielded to are appropriately repented of, is eligible to do anything in the Church that can be done by any member of the Church who is single. Occasionally, there's an office, like the office of bishop, where a person must be married. But that's rather the exception in the Church. Every teaching position, every missionary position can be held by single people. We welcome to that kind of service people who are struggling with any kind of temptation when the struggle is a good struggle and they are living so as to be appropriate teachers, or missionaries, or whatever the calling may be.

11. CHURCH PARTICIPATION AND SERVICE ARE NOT DENIED TO HOMOSEXUALS

The recent clarification that all church service opportunities other than those that require marriage are open to chaste homosexual brothers and sisters is a welcome one, but one that has not yet fully permeated the church rank and file. Sadly, there are numerous instances of otherwise fully worthy same sex oriented members (including some of our own children) being released from callings as visiting and home teachers and as auxiliary and priesthood leaders, and being essentially shunned by church members when their orientation is made public by themselves or others. Also, to be realistic, no homosexual male is likely to be called to a leadership position (certainly not bishop, stake president, patriarch or high counselor), nor is either gender homosexual likely to be called to be an ordinance worker in the temple. Also, revealing deep-seated prejudice, no known homosexual male would likely be called to work with young men or homosexual female be called to work with young women, even though heterosexuals are just as likely as homosexuals to pose a danger to young people.

There are some bishops and stake presidents who are unwilling to submit the names of young men and young women (including some of our own children) to serve missions when they learn of their homosexual orientation.

It should be understood that not only is it acceptable to have a same sex orientation but it is likewise acceptable to disclose this fact publicly without fear of recrimination or prejudice. In short, this is a wonderful clarification which will hopefully be understood better in the future.

	<p>ELDER WICKMAN: Isn't it really the significance of the Atonement in a person's life? Doesn't the Atonement really begin to mean something to a person when he or she is trying to face down the challenges of living, whether they be temptations or limitations? The willingness to turn to the Savior, the opportunity of going to sacrament service on a Sunday, and really participating in the ordinance of the sacrament ... listening to the prayers, partaking of those sacred emblems. Those are opportunities that really help us to come within the ambit of the Savior's Atonement. Viewed that way, then any opportunity to serve in the Church is a blessing. As has been mentioned, there is a relatively tiny handful of callings within the Church that require marriage.</p> <p>ELDER OAKS: There is another point to add here, and this comes from a recent statement of the First Presidency, which is a wonderful description of our attitude in this matter: "We of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reach out with understanding and respect for individuals who are attracted to those of the same gender. We realize there may be great loneliness in their lives, but there must also be recognition of what is right before the Lord."</p>	<p>12. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE ATONEMENT TO HOMOSEXUALITY</p> <p><i>We welcome a clarification that the Atonement is not expected to produce a "transition out of homosexuality" or a successful marriage, as some have taught. We appreciate expressions of "respect" for those attracted to the same gender. Such expressions underscore a recognition that sexual orientation is a "core characteristic" of personality, not a choice or one that can be expected to "go away." (See item 3 above).</i></p>
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<p>What would you say to those members in society, members of the Church, who may look at same-gender attraction as different than other temptations, than any other struggle</p>	<p>ELDER OAKS: I think it is an accurate statement to say that some people consider feelings of same-gender attraction to be the defining fact of their existence. There are also people who consider the defining fact of their existence that they are from Texas or that they were in the United States Marines.</p>	<p>13. HOMOSEXUALITY SHOULD NOT BE THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC OF A PERSON'S LIFE?</p> <p><i>Ascribed characteristics are those that we essentially inherit at birth or that lie beyond volition. These might range from skin and eye color to such physical propensities as left handedness and sexual orientation.</i></p>
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<p>that people face? First of all, do you think it's a fair assessment that some people have that feeling? What would you say to them?</p>	<p>Or they are red-headed, or they are the best basketball player that ever played for such-and-such a high school. People can adopt a characteristic as the defining example of their existence and often those characteristics are physical. We have the agency to choose which characteristics will define us; those choices are not thrust upon us. The ultimate defining fact for all of us is that we are children of Heavenly Parents, born on this earth for a purpose, and born with a divine destiny. Whenever any of those other notions, whatever they may be, gets in the way of that ultimate defining fact, then it is destructive and it leads us down the wrong path.</p>	<p><i>Achieved characteristics are those that generally are a result of our own individual choices such as getting an education or serving in the Marine Corps. The former are widely recognized by social and behavioral scientists to be very different human attributes not only in their origins but also in regard to their effect on human interaction.</i></p> <p><i>We contend that most homosexuals in our families don't regard their sexual orientation as the "defining fact of their existence" any more than do heterosexuals, and yet it is clearly <u>one</u> of the defining facts of their existence. In reality, most of us consider ourselves as complex beings, defined by a number of characteristics, only one of which is our sexual orientation.</i></p> <p><i>While it may be true to some extent that "we have the agency to choose which characteristics will define us," our sexual orientation is inextricably part of our identity.</i></p>
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<p>Both of you have mentioned the issue of compassion and this feeling about needing to be compassionate. Let's fast-forward the scenario that we used earlier, and assume it's a couple of years later. My conversations with my son, all our efforts to love our son and keep him in the Church have failed to address what he sees as the central issue — that</p>	<p>ELDER OAKS: It seems to me that a Latter-day Saint parent has a responsibility in love and gentleness to affirm the teaching of the Lord through His prophets that the course of action he is about to embark upon is sinful. While affirming our continued love for him, and affirming that the family continues to have its arms open to him, I think it would be well to review with him something like the following, which is a statement of the First Presidency in 1991: "The Lord's law of moral conduct is abstinence outside of lawful marriage and fidelity within marriage.</p>	<p>14. PROPER RESPONSE TO HOMOSEXUAL SON LIVING WITH GAY FRIEND</p> <p><i>We warmly support the principle that the first responsibility of parents to their children is to assure them that they are loved and will always be safe within the family circle. The Lord expects us to rear our children in light and truth with love unfeigned. So we feel strongly that our first responsibility to our children is to love them. Without fulfilling this first responsibility, we feel that attempts to teach or remind them of gospel principles will be less than effective.</i></p> <p><i>Active LDS children will already be fully aware that sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage are considered to be sinful by the Church. This fact they have known from their first recognition of sexual</i></p>
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he can't help his feelings. He's now told us that he's moving out of the home. He plans to live with a gay friend. He's adamant about it. What should be the proper response of a Latter-day Saint parent in that situation?

Sexual relations are proper only between husband and wife, appropriately expressed within the bonds of marriage. Any other sexual conduct, including fornication, adultery, and homosexual and lesbian behavior is sinful. Those who persist in such practices or influence others to do so are subject to Church discipline." My first responsibility as a father is to make sure that he understands that, and then to say to him, "My son, if you choose to deliberately engage in this kind of behavior, you're still my son. The Atonement of Jesus Christ is powerful enough to reach out and cleanse you if you are repentant and give up your sinful behavior, but I urge you not to embark on that path because repentance is not easy. You're embarking on a course of action that will weaken you in your ability to repent. It will cloud your perceptions of what is important in life. Finally, it may drag you down so far that you can't come back. Don't go that way. But if you choose to go that way, we will always try to help you and get you back on the path of growth.

ELDER WICKMAN: One way to read the Book of Mormon is as a book of encounters between fathers and sons. Some of those encounters were very positive and reinforcing on the part of the father of a son. Some were occasions where a father had to tell his son or his sons that the path that they were following was incorrect before the Lord. With all, it needs to be done in the spirit of love and welcoming that, as Elder Oaks mentioned, 'You're always my son.' There's an old maxim which is really true for every parent and that is, 'You haven't failed until

feelings and is one reason why they are so frightened by the prospect of speaking with their parents or church leaders about their homosexuality in the first place.

Unfortunately, once they muster the courage to discuss their same sex orientation with family and church leaders, there will be many who feel compelled to tell them what is right and wrong, something they already know.

If engaged in repeatedly, this approach, however well meaning, often results in alienation from the family and bitterness regarding the church.

We note that Edward Kimball's biography of his father, Pres. Spencer W. Kimball, recounts President Kimball's relationship with his oldest son, Spencer, who was not active in the Church during his entire adult life. Although President Kimball meant well, his choice to constantly remind his son of his shortcomings and sinful practices (not homosexuality) constituted a lifelong barrier to what might otherwise have been a loving family relationship.

	<p>you quit trying.’ I think that means both in terms of taking appropriate opportunities to teach one’s children the right way, but at all times making sure they know that over all things you’ll love them.</p>	
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<p>At what point does showing that love cross the line into inadvertently endorsing behavior? If the son says, ‘Well, if you love me, can I bring my partner to our home to visit? Can we come for holidays?’ How do you balance that against, for example, concern for other children in the home?’</p>	<p>ELDER OAKS: That’s a decision that needs to be made individually by the person responsible, calling upon the Lord for inspiration. I can imagine that in most circumstances the parents would say, ‘Please don’t do that. Don’t put us into that position.’ Surely if there are children in the home who would be influenced by this example, the answer would likely be that. There would also be other factors that would make that the likely answer. I can also imagine some circumstances in which it might be possible to say, ‘Yes, come, but don’t expect to stay overnight. Don’t expect to be a lengthy house guest. Don’t expect us to take you out and introduce you to our friends, or to deal with you in a public situation that would imply our approval of your “partnership.” There are so many different circumstances, it’s impossible to give one answer that fits all.</p> <p>ELDER WICKMAN: It’s hard to imagine a more difficult circumstance for a parent to face than that one. It is a case by case determination. The only thing that I would add to what Elder Oaks has just said is that I think it’s important as a parent to</p>	<p>15. DOES SHOWING LOVE ENDORSE HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVITY?</p> <p><i>We very much appreciate the recognition by Elder Oaks of a parent’s right to inspiration. Furthermore, there is an article of faith that affirms that each one of us is individually responsible for his or her own behavior. Therefore, we feel that parents do not endorse homosexual behavior simply because they enjoy amicable relations with their adult children and refrain from constant judgmental reference to their child’s sexual orientation.</i></p> <p><i>We feel it is possible to enjoy close familial relations with our homosexual children and their loved ones even though they have chosen a life different from our own or the one we might wish for them.</i></p> <p><i>It’s also significant to recognize that unmarried heterosexual partners are found in nearly every ward and in many LDS families in the Church, living together in an unmarried status, and yet most of us allow them to sort out their own lives without continual judgment or censure. Surely our children involved in homosexual relationships deserve no less.</i></p> <p><i>When such relationships result in children being either naturally born or adopted, it is particularly important for families to embrace those children, who did not choose the circumstances in which they find themselves. Nevertheless, we know of instances where good Latter-day Saints have refused to allow such children into the family circle. This seems counter to gospel principles.</i></p>
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	<p>avoid a potential trap arising out of one's anguish over this situation. I refer to a shift from defending the Lord's way to defending the errant child's lifestyle, both with him and with others. It really is true the Lord's way is to love the sinner while condemning the sin. That is to say we continue to open our homes and our hearts and our arms to our children, but that need not be with approval of their lifestyle. Neither does it mean we need to be constantly telling them that their lifestyle is inappropriate. An even bigger error is now to become defensive of the child, because that neither helps the child nor helps the parent. That course of action, which experience teaches, is almost certainly to lead both away from the Lord's way.</p>	<p><i>We agree that whether heterosexual or homosexual, the same rules would seem to be in order when bringing unmarried partners to the family home. Concern for the feelings of other family members, including younger children, would seem to dictate separate bedrooms and restrained behavior on the part of the returning son or daughter.</i></p>

	<p>ELDER OAKS: The First Presidency made a wonderful statement on this subject in a letter in 1991. Speaking of individuals and families that were struggling with this kind of problem, they said, "We encourage Church leaders and members to reach out with love and understanding to those struggling with these issues." Surely if we are counseled as a body of Church membership to reach out with love and understanding to those 'struggling with these issues,' that obligation rests with particular intensity on parents who have children struggling with these issues... even children who are engaged in sinful behavior associated with these issues.</p>	<p>16. PARENTAL OBLIGATION TO SHOW LOVE TO THEIR HOMOSEXUAL CHILDREN</p> <p><i>When individuals leave the Church or are not members of the Church we do not condemn them if they fail to live the Word of Wisdom or abide by other gospel principles. We see little to be gained when our children have left the Church and are in committed, stable relationships for us to constantly be reminding them that their committed behavior is "sinful." Such judgment tends to create barriers which we prefer not to be part of our family dynamic.</i></p>
<p>Is rejection of a child</p>	<p>ELDER OAKS: We surely</p>	<p>17. WE SHOULD REJECT NEITHER THE</p>

<p>to some degree the natural reaction of some parents whenever their children fall short of expectations? Is it sometimes easier to 'close the window' on an issue than deal with it?</p>	<p>encourage parents not to blame themselves and we encourage Church members not to blame parents in this circumstance. We should remember that none of us is perfect and none of us has children whose behavior is entirely in accord with exactly what we would have them do in all circumstances. We feel great compassion for parents whose love and protective instincts for their challenged children have moved them to some positions that are adversary to the Church. I hope the Lord will be merciful to parents whose love for their children has caused them to get into such traps.</p>	<p>HOMOSEXUAL CHILD NOR THE PARENTS</p> <p><i>We appreciate this statement and an earlier one by Elder Oaks. Elder Oaks' earlier statement would seem to answer the first question in no uncertain terms:</i></p> <p><i>“... if we are counseled as a body of Church membership to reach out with love and understanding to those 'struggling with these issues,' that obligation rests with particular intensity on parents who have children struggling with these issues..., even children who are engaged in sinful behavior associated with these issues.” [The Ensign, October, 1995]</i></p> <p><i>Of course it would be easier to “close the window” than deal with the issue, but that would only serve to reinforce a child's feeling of being unloved and misunderstood.</i></p> <p><i>As parents who have accepted a child's choices because we felt we needed to do so, it is painful to accept the judgment that we are considered an adversary of the Church.</i></p>
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<p>Let's fast-forward again. My son has now stopped coming to church altogether. There seems no prospect of him returning. Now he tells me he's planning on going to Canada where same-gender marriage is allowed. He insists that he agrees that loving marriage relationships are important. He's not promiscuous; he has one relationship. He and his partner intend to have that relationship for the rest of their lives. He cannot understand that a lifetime</p>	<p>ELDER WICKMAN: For openers, marriage is neither a matter of politics, nor is it a matter of social policy. Marriage is defined by the Lord Himself. It's the one institution that is ceremoniously performed by priesthood authority in the temple [and] transcends this world. It is of such profound importance... such a core doctrine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, of the very purpose of the creation of this earth. One hardly can get past the first page of Genesis without seeing that very clearly. It is not an institution to be tampered with by mankind, and certainly not to be tampered with by those who are doing so simply for their own purposes. There is no such thing in the Lord's eyes as something called same-gender marriage.</p>	<p>18. DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE IS DIVINE, NOT POLITICAL</p> <p><i>We feel it is tremendously important to communicate to our children that we value committed relationships. If our children can find a way to be celibate, they can live within the Church. If they cannot, we feel it would be a mistake not to indicate our preference for a long-term commitment to a single partner over multiple partners. Perhaps Church leaders are not, at this point, prepared to speak about the difference between casual sexual relations and committed same sex partners who would marry given the opportunity to do so. Parents who have children with same sex attractions can and do make that distinction.</i></p> <p><i>Again, this seems to be an area in which there are gray areas. It is our understanding that under certain circumstances the Church has recognized “common law” marriages and, in countries that do not recognize divorce, has accepted as valid relationships that technically involve partners who are legally married to others.</i></p>
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<p>commitment can't be accepted by the Church when society seems to be moving in that way. Again, if I am a Latter-day Saint father, what would I be expected to tell him?</p>	<p>Homosexual behavior is and will always remain before the Lord an abominable sin. Calling it something else by virtue of some political definition does not change that reality.</p> <p>ELDER OAKS: Another way to say that same thing is that the Parliament in Canada and the Congress in Washington do not have the authority to revoke the commandments of God, or to modify or amend them in any way.</p>	<p><i>While the Church is under no obligation to recognize marriages or partnerships sanctioned by civil law, it is important to note that some of our homosexual children are entering into such unions because they are seeking a commitment that has the same values and obligations of sanctioned heterosexual marriages.</i></p> <p><i>We object to the term “abominable” in relation to homosexuality. There are many things that might be considered abominations before the Lord. Proverbs lists seven, including pride, lying, and bearing false witness, and yet they are not normally called abominations. We find such language counter productive.</i></p>
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<p>On some gay web sites there are those who argue that homosexual behavior is not specifically prohibited in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament. Some argue that Jesus Christ's compassion and love for humanity embraces this kind of relationship. What is the Church's teaching about that?</p>	<p>ELDER WICKMAN: For one thing, those who assert that need to read their Bible more carefully. But beyond that, it is comparing apples and oranges to refer to the love that the Savior expressed for all mankind, for every person, for every man and woman and child, with the doctrine related to marriage. In fact, the Savior did make a declaration about marriage, albeit in a somewhat different context. Jesus said that “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and they twain shall be one flesh. What God has joined together let no man put asunder.” We usually think of that expression in the context of two people, a man and a woman, being married and the inappropriateness of someone trying to separate them. I think it may have a broader meaning in a doctrinal sense. Marriage of a man and a woman is clear in Biblical teaching in the Old Testament as well as in the New [Testament] teaching.</p>	<p>19. BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ABOUT MARRIAGE</p> <p><i>As parents we know that in modern times, prophets and apostles have vigorously defended the plurality of wives as correct when it is ordained of God. Why could not same sex marriage also be correct when ordained by the same divine source? Obviously that hasn't happened but many homosexual Latter-day Saints and their families hope that the possibility exists.</i></p>
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	<p>Anyone who seeks to put that notion asunder is likewise running counter to what Jesus Himself said. It's important to keep in mind the difference between Jesus' love and His definition of doctrine, and the definition of doctrine that has come from apostles and prophets of the Lord Jesus Christ, both anciently and in modern times.</p>	
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<p>What of those who might say, "Okay. Latter-day Saints are entitled to believe whatever they like. If you don't believe in same-gender marriages, then it's fine for you. But why try to regulate the behavior of other people who have nothing to do with your faith, especially when some nations in Europe have legally sanctioned that kind of marriage? Why not just say, 'We don't agree with it doctrinally for our own people' and leave it at that. Why fight to get a Constitutional amendment [in the United States], for example?</p>	<p>ELDER WICKMAN: We're not trying to regulate people, but this notion that 'what happens in your house doesn't affect what happens in my house' on the subject of the institution of marriage may be the ultimate sophistry of those advocating same-gender marriage. Some people promote the idea that there can be two marriages, co-existing side by side, one heterosexual and one homosexual, without any adverse consequences. The hard reality is that, as an institution, marriage like all other institutions can only have one definition without changing the very character of the institution. Hence there can be no coexistence of two marriages. Either there is marriage as it is now defined and as defined by the Lord, or there is what could thus be described as genderless marriage. The latter is abhorrent to God, who, as we've been discussing, Himself described what marriage is — between a man and a woman. A redefinition of that institution, therefore, redefines it for everyone —</p>	<p>20. NECESSITY FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT</p> <p><i>As parents we have a hard time explaining to our children the argument that marriage can only have one definition without changing the character of the institution. Our difficulty is related to the fact that many of our family histories include ancestors with a rather different form of marriage— one that not only went against “thousands of years of human experience,” but which the government considered unlawful and the vast majority of citizens considered barbaric.</i></p> <p><i>Early LDS leaders made it clear that polygamy was the preferred mode of marriage and some even argued that heterosexual monogamy itself was an inferior mode of marriage. However, plural marriage did not try to do away with the traditional marriage of one man and one woman. Both forms of marriage existed side by side in the Church until just a little over a hundred years ago and still exist side-by-side in some cultures (and in the Mormon concept of the afterlife).</i></p> <p><i>Today with some exceptions marriage is defined as between one man and one woman, and as Church members we are enjoined to be obedient to the laws of the land in which we live or of which we are citizens. However, where such laws permit legal same-sex civil unions or marriages, and our children are living within those jurisdictions, they are not acting contrary to civil</i></p>
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	<p>not just those who are seeking to have a so-called same gender marriage. It also ignores the definition that the Lord Himself has given.</p> <p>ELDER OAKS: There's another point that can be made on this. Let's not forget that for thousands of years the institution of marriage has been between a man and a woman. Until quite recently, in a limited number of countries, there has been no such thing as a marriage between persons of the same gender. Suddenly we are faced with the claim that thousands of years of human experience should be set aside because we should not discriminate in relation to the institution of marriage. When that claim is made, the burden of proving that this step will not undo the wisdom and stability of millennia of experience lies on those who would make the change. Yet the question is asked and the matter is put forward as if those who believe in marriage between a man and a woman have the burden of proving that it should not be extended to some other set of conditions.</p>	<p><i>law when they enter into such contractual relationships. How the Church itself regards such relationships is, of course, a separate matter. Again, it is worth noting that in relation to heterosexual marriage, the Church has made accommodation when civil law prohibits divorced individuals from remarrying.</i></p> <p><i>Since this is a controversial issue, our children stress that the burden of proof is on both sides. Where same-sex marriages now exist legally along side opposite-sex marriages, they say there appears to be no evidence that heterosexual marriages have either diminished or suffered. Further, they note that there are many threats to traditional marriage, all of them pre-dating the recent call for approval of same-sex marriages. They argue convincingly that sanctioning same-sex marriages both increases the number of people in committed relationships and diminishes the number of failed marriages when homosexuals marry heterosexuals. Undoubtedly, it will take some long-term scientific studies to determine the validity of the claim that same-sex marriage actually undermines opposite-sex marriage, but at present there seems to be little reason, based on this possibility, for us to oppose such marriages. As parents, we feel a better focus would be on the many other factors that pose real, demonstrable, scientifically validated evidence of weakening traditional marriage.</i></p> <p><i>Our children stress that new scientific breakthroughs, including new understandings of the origin and etiology of homosexuality, are challenging traditional beliefs and practices. Examples include new methods of contraception, in vitro fertilization, stem-cell research, and organ transplantation.</i></p>
<p>There are those who would say that that might have applied better in the 1950s or earlier than in the 21st century. If you look at several nations in Europe, for example, traditional marriage is so rapidly on the decline that it is no longer the norm. If marriage is evolving,</p>	<p>ELDER OAKS: That argument impresses me as something akin to the fact that if we agree that the patient is sick and getting sicker, we should therefore approve a coup de grace. The coup de grace which ends the patient's life altogether is quite equivalent to the drastic modification in the institution of marriage that would be brought on by same-gender marriage.</p>	<p>21. NEED TO UPHOLD CURRENT DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE</p> <p><i>We agree that the erosion of traditional marriage should not be an argument in favor of homosexual marriage. On the other hand, we feel there is some validity to the argument that permitting homosexual marriage may in fact strengthen heterosexual marriage in that it would likely prevent the break-up of so many marriages between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Further, the more people in a culture who are in permanent, committed relationships strengthens the</i></p>

<p>ought we to resist those kind of social changes?</p>		<p><i>idea that such commitment is preferable to casual, non-committed relationships.</i></p>
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<p>You talked about the harm that could come on society by redefining marriage. What would you say to those people who declare: "I know gay people who are in long-term committed relationships. They're great people. They love each other. What harm is it going to do my marriage as a heterosexual to allow them that same 'rite?'"</p>	<p>ELDER WICKMAN: Let me say again what I said a moment ago. I believe that that argument is true sophistry, because marriage is a unified institution. Marriage means a committed, legally sanctioned relationship between a man and a woman. That's what it means. That's what it means in the revelations. That's what it means in the secular law. You cannot have that marriage coexisting institutionally with something else called same-gender marriage. It simply is a definitional impossibility. At such point as you now, as an institution, begin to recognize a legally-sanctioned relationship, a committed relationship between two people of the same gender, you have now redefined the institution to being one of genderless marriage. As we've mentioned in answer to other questions, [genderless marriage] is contrary to God's law, to revealed Word. Scripture, ancient and modern, could not be clearer on the definition that the Lord and His agents have given to marriage down through the dispensations. But it has a profound effect in a very secular way on everybody else. What happens in somebody's house down the street does in very deed have an effect on what happens in my house and how it's treated. To suggest that in the face of these millennia of history and the revelations of God</p>	<p>22. REASONS FOR NOT LEGALIZING SAME SEX MARRIAGE</p> <p><i>We as parents are having to face the fact that there are now a number of recognized legal state and nation homosexual marriages. Therefore, some of our homosexual children are in "committed, legally sanctioned relationship[s]" and in these instances it is no longer "a definitional impossibility," any more than it is in societies that permit polygamous marriages.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, choosing to restrict the legal right to marriage does not protect it, since more than half of all U.S. marriages currently end in divorce. In other words, there are very real threats to marriage today, including divorce, infidelity, and domestic violence. Homosexual marriage, however, does not seem to be a threat to marriage. Scientific evidence appears to support the contention that same sex unions have no impact on the frequency, quality or endurance of heterosexual marriage except, again, when such marriages are between homosexuals and heterosexuals.</i></p> <p><i>It is instructive to observe what has happened in Canada, a country with very similar social, cultural and historical foundations as the United States. Same-sex marriage was legalized across Canada by the Civil Marriage Act of July 20, 2005. Court decisions, starting in 2003, had already legalized same-sex marriage in eight out of ten provinces and one of three territories, whose residents comprised about 90% of Canada's population. Before passage of the Act, more than 3,000 same-sex couples had already married in these areas. Most legal benefits commonly associated with marriage had already been extended to cohabiting same-sex couples since 1999.</i></p> <p><i>The Church may not change its doctrinal position any time soon, but we hope that the Church will change its attitude towards our homosexual members (including our children) who are living in monogamous</i></p>
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and the whole human pattern they have the right to redefine the whole institution for everyone is presumptuous in the extreme and terribly wrong-headed.

ELDER OAKS: Another point to be made about this is made in a question. If a couple who are cohabiting, happy, and committed to one another want to have their relationship called a marriage, why do they want that? Considering what they say they have, why do they want to add to it the legal status of marriage that has been honored and experienced for thousands of years? What is it that is desired by those who advocate same-gender marriage? If that could be articulated on some basis other than discrimination, which is not a very good argument, it would be easier to answer the question that you have asked, and I think it would reveal the soundness of what we've already heard. There are certain indicia of marriage — certain legal and social consequences and certain legitimacy — which if given to some relationship other than marriage between a man and a woman tend to degrade if not destroy the institution that's been honored over so many thousands of years. In addition, if people want to legalize a particular relationship, we need to be careful if that kind of relationship has been disapproved for millennia. Suddenly there's a call to legalize it so they can feel better about themselves. That argument proves a little too much. Suppose a person is making a living in some illegal behavior, but feels uneasy about it. (He may be a professional thief or he may be selling a service that is illegal, or whatever it may

partnerships. Rather than excommunicating those who are among the most marginalized and therefore the most in need of Christ's love and fellowship in his Church, perhaps Church members could open their arms and say to our homosexual children what they say to heterosexual members living in unmarried relationships, "Please come and worship with us. You are welcome here."

To suggest that those wishing to enter into legal, permanent relationship want to do so to "feel good" is to greatly misunderstand the motivation of our children. They wish to have such relationships sanctioned for the same reasons heterosexual couples do—because such a contract affirms commitment and binds the partners to be true to one another "in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, in good times and in bad, to love, honor, and cherish, until death"; because it provides certain social benefits (insurance, tax benefits, etc.); and because it provides certain legal protections (property rights, visiting rights, parental rights, etc.). Beyond this are the spiritual benefits of such a relationship.

	<p>be.) Do we go out and legalize his behavior because he's being discriminated against in his occupational choices or because he doesn't feel well about what he's doing and he wants a 'feel good' example, or he wants his behavior legitimized in the eyes of society or his family? I think the answer is that we do not legalize behavior for those reasons unless they are very persuasive reasons brought forward to make a change in the current situation.</p>	
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<p>Would you extend the same argument against same-gender marriage to civil unions or some kind of benefits short of marriage?</p>	<p>ELDER WICKMAN: One way to think of marriage is as a bundle of rights associated with what it means for two people to be married. What the First Presidency has done is express its support of marriage and for that bundle of rights belonging to a man and a woman. The First Presidency hasn't expressed itself concerning any specific right. It really doesn't matter what you call it. If you have some legally sanctioned relationship with the bundle of legal rights traditionally belonging to marriage and governing authority has slapped a label on it, whether it is civil union or domestic partnership or whatever label it's given, it is nonetheless tantamount to marriage. That is something to which our doctrine simply requires us to speak out and say, "That is not right. That's not appropriate." As far as something less than that — as far as relationships that give to some pairs in our society some right but not all of those associated with marriage — as to that, as far as I know, the First Presidency hasn't expressed</p>	<p>23. CHURCH'S STAND ON RECOGNIZING SAME SEX PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER NAMES</p> <p><i>As parents, we want to protect the fundamental teachings of the Savior, but life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are guaranteed to us as citizens. We feel we should not do anything that imposes a way of life that cannot be enjoyed by a minority of us simply because it is the preference of the majority. All people, including our gay and lesbian children, must be allowed to be happy and enjoy equal benefits of civil society financed by them as taxpayers.</i></p> <p><i>We may deny members our fellowship (for very particular reasons) but we should not deny them their rights as citizens. Since the First Presidency has not expressed itself concerning any specific rights associated with civil unions, we parents feel it would seem like a good idea to follow suit.</i></p> <p><i>Our children maintain that there are no studies indicating that same-sex parents are less capable of caring for children than are opposite sex parents. That said, we agree that an ideal situation for any child is to have parents of both genders. However, we must recognize that such an ideal is rapidly becoming the exception in our society in which increasingly children are raised by single parents, grandparents, and others. With increasing numbers of homosexual couples adopting or having children through surrogates, we feel it is important to recognize gay couples as being</i></p>
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	<p>itself. There are numbers of different types of partnerships or pairings that may exist in society that aren't same-gender sexual relationships that provide for some right that we have no objection to. All that said... there may be on occasion some specific rights that we would be concerned about being granted to those in a same-gender relationship. Adoption is one that comes to mind, simply because that is a right which has been historically, doctrinally associated so closely with marriage and family. I cite the example of adoption simply because it has to do with the bearing and the rearing of children. Our teachings, even as expressed most recently in a very complete doctrinal sense in the Family Proclamation by living apostles and prophets, is that children deserve to be reared in a home with a father and a mother.</p>	<p><i>one of the alternative ways of raising children in today's world, just as polygamous family networks constituted one of the ways Latter-day Saint children were raised in the nineteenth century. These often involved polygamous wives raising children in homes from which the father was often absent for extended periods of time.</i></p> <p><i>When our same-sex oriented children choose to raise children, we believe it is in the best interest of those children and their parents to be part of an extended family circle that welcomes them as they would the children of heterosexual couples. What our grandchildren need, whether they have opposite or same-sex parents, is nurturing and love.</i></p>
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<p>On the issue of a Constitutional amendment prohibiting same-gender marriage, there are some Latter-day Saints who are opposed to same-gender marriage, but who are not in favor of addressing this through a Constitutional amendment. Why did the Church feel that it had to step in that direction?</p>	<p>ELDER OAKS: Law has at least two roles: one is to define and regulate the limits of acceptable behavior. The other is to teach principles for individuals to make individual choices. The law declares unacceptable some things that are simply not enforceable, and there's no prosecutor who tries to enforce them. We refer to that as the teaching function of the law. The time has come in our society when I see great wisdom and purpose in a United States Constitutional amendment declaring that marriage is between a man and a woman. There is nothing in that proposed amendment that requires a criminal prosecution or that directs the attorneys general to go out and round people up, but it declares a principle and it</p>	<p>24. THE ROLE OF LAW IN UPHOLDING CORRECT PRINCIPLES</p> <p><i>As LDS parents of gay and lesbian children, we look for the day when our children receive the full rights and privileges to which they are entitled under the Constitution.</i></p>
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also creates a defensive barrier against those who would alter that traditional definition of marriage. There are people who oppose a federal Constitutional amendment because they think that the law of family should be made by the states. I can see a legitimate argument there. I think it's mistaken, however, because the federal government, through the decisions of life-tenured federal judges, has already taken over that area. This Constitutional amendment is a defensive measure against those who would ignore the will of the states appropriately expressed and require, as a matter of federal law, the recognition of same-gender marriages — or the invalidation of state laws that require that marriage be between a man and a woman. In summary, the First Presidency has come out for an amendment (which may or may not be adopted) in support of the teaching function of the law. Such an amendment would be a very important expression of public policy, which would feed into or should feed into the decisions of judges across the length and breadth of the land.

ELDER WICKMAN: Let me just add to that, if I may. It's not the Church that has made the issue of marriage a matter of federal law. Those who are vigorously advocating for something called same-gender marriage have essentially put that potato on the fork. They're the ones who have created a situation whereby the law of the land, one way or the other, is going to address this issue of marriage. This is not a situation where the Church has elected to take the matter into the legal arena or into the political arena. It's

already there. The fact of the matter is that the best way to assure that a definition of marriage as it now stands continues is to put it into the foundational legal document of the United States. That is in the Constitution. That's where the battle has taken it. Ultimately that's where the battle is going to be decided. It's going to be decided as a matter of federal law one way or the other. Consequently it is not a battleground on such an issue that we Latter-day Saints have chosen, but it has been established and we have little choice but to express our views concerning it, which is really all that the Church has done.

Decisions even for members of the Church as to what they do with respect to this issue must of course rest with each one in their capacity as citizens.

We consider the following comment by Elder Wickman to be the most important one with reference to same gender marriage.

“Decisions even for members of the Church as to what they do with respect to this issue must of course rest with each one in their capacity as citizens.”

The emphasis that has been placed in this conversation on traditional marriage between a man and a woman has been consistent throughout. Do you see any irony in the fact that the Church is so publicly outspoken on this issue, when in the minds of so many people in the United States and around the world the Church is known for once supporting a very untraditional marriage arrangement — that is, polygamy?

ELDER OAKS: I see irony in that if one views it without the belief that we affirm in divine revelation. The 19th century Mormons, including some of my ancestors, were not eager to practice plural marriage. They followed the example of Brigham Young, who expressed his profound negative feelings when he first had this principle revealed to him. The Mormons of the 19th century who practiced plural marriage, male and female, did so because they felt it was a duty put upon them by God. When that duty was lifted, they were directed to conform to the law of the land, which forbade polygamy and which had been held constitutional. When they were told to refrain from plural marriage, there were probably some who were unhappy, but I think the

25. THE ROLE OF DIVINE REVELATION

Because we believe in continuous revelation, we believe that it is entirely possible that the Lord could one day reveal that same-sex marriage, at least for mortality, is acceptable.

To us as parents with polygamy in our family history, the irony exists when there is not a recognition that in an earlier century the Church favored polygamous marriage as the ideal form of marriage, and currently favors heterosexual monogamy as the only form of marriage acceptable to the Lord or to civilized society. It is the failure to acknowledge this seeming irony that makes it difficult for our children to accept the pronouncements against same-sex marriage as part of a consistent eternal perspective. We personally feel at a loss in explaining the contradiction.

	<p>majority were greatly relieved and glad to get back into the mainstream of western civilization, which had been marriage between a man and a woman. In short, if you start with the assumption of continuing revelation, on which this Church is founded, then you can understand that there is no irony in this. But if you don't start with that assumption, you see a profound irony.</p>	
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<p>What about various types of support groups for those with same-gender affliction?</p>	<p>ELDER WICKMAN: I think we neither encourage nor discourage them, but much would depend on the nature of those groups. We certainly discourage people getting involved with any group or organization that foster living a homosexual lifestyle. Ultimately, the wisest course for anybody who's afflicted with same-gender attraction is to strive to extend one's horizon beyond just one's sexual orientation, one's gender orientation, and to try to see the whole person. If I'm one that's afflicted with same-gender attraction, I should strive to see myself in a much broader context... seeing myself as a child of God with whatever my talents may be, whether intellect, or music, or athletics, or somebody that has a compassion to help people, to see myself in a larger setting and thus to see my life in that setting. The more a person can look beyond gender orientation, the happier and more fulfilling life is likely to be. The worst possible thing for any of us — no matter what our temptations, no matter what our mortal inclinations may be — is to become fixated with them, to dwell on</p>	<p>26. SUPPORT GROUPS ARE A MATTER OF PERSONAL CHOICE</p> <p><i>Human beings by nature are social creatures and naturally seek to be bonded to another who can help them fulfill the full measure of their creation. While there are heterosexuals who may never marry, they are encouraged to socialize with each other in an effort to find a mate who can help them counter the loneliness of single life. As parents we recognize in our children that such longings for companionship are just as strong for homosexuals as they are for heterosexuals.</i></p> <p><i>We have been told by those who should know that the Church supports Evergreen from Humanitarian funds. Also, at times local leaders have established ad hoc support groups for homosexuals.</i></p> <p><i>It seems obvious to us that the very reason such groups and organizations exist is that there are few places that homosexuals can go to get understanding and fellowship simply because they are excluded from or marginalized by most organizations with which they are affiliated. As such they are no different than abused women, children of alcoholics, and others who seek support groups to help them deal with their feelings. Such feelings don't necessarily define them, but they are an undeniable part of who they are. We feel it is unfair to our homosexual children to suggest that their affiliation with support groups is a result of a fixation on their sexual orientation or a failure to see themselves as more complex beings. Many heterosexuals belong to support groups of various kinds because such groups meet particular needs. It</i></p>
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	<p>them. When we do that, not only do we deny the other things that comprise us, but experience teaches that there will be an increased likelihood that eventually we will simply succumb to the inclination.</p> <p>ELDER OAKS: The principle that Elder Wickman has talked about, in a nutshell, is that if you are trying to live with and maintain ascendancy over same-gender attractions, the best way to do that is to have groups that define their members in terms other than same-gender attractions.</p>	<p><i>isn't necessarily "ascendancy over same-gender attractions" that motivates them to join or participate in such groups, but rather a wish to find ways of coping with a condition that society rejects and which therefore causes them much pain.</i></p> <p><i>As family members we have established support groups to help us understand and help our homosexual children and to cope with the challenges we face ourselves in a society often hostile to our children. In a way, such support groups are similar to those the church itself sponsors for members who face issues relating to addictive behaviors.</i></p> <p><i>We submit that members of the Church socialize regularly with friends and have close relationships with their children who: 1) are living outside marriage, 2) do not keep the Word of Wisdom, 3) violate ethical standards of honesty in business, 4) fail to be charitable to the poor, etc. We don't think such parents can or should be accused of "fostering a sinful lifestyle." As noted earlier, such individuals should not be expected to police the sinfulness of other adults, including their own children. For them, as for us with our gay children, each person is responsible for his or her own sins and not the sins of others.</i></p>
<p>If you had to describe this enormously complex question in a couple of basic principles, what would that be?</p>	<p>ELDER OAKS: God loves all of His children. He has provided a plan for His children to enjoy the choicest blessings that He has to offer in eternity. Those choicest blessings are associated with marriage between a man and a woman by appropriate priesthood authority to bring together a family unit for creation and happiness in this life and in the life to come. We urge persons with same-gender attractions to control those and to refrain from acting upon them, which is a sin, just as we urge persons with heterosexual attractions to refrain from acting upon them until they have the opportunity for a marriage recognized by God as well as by the law of the land. That is the way to happiness and eternal life. God has</p>	<p>27. FINAL COMMENT</p> <p><i>While at present the Church recognizes only one form of marriage, we are aware that there is a growing sentiment within our society to recognize and legitimize same-sex bonding. While we would wish for all members to abide by current doctrinal standards, we recognize that many heterosexual and homosexual members choose alternative ways of living, especially in the case of homosexuals where there is no opportunity for them to keep the commandment to marry. Without condoning such relationships, we feel it is our Christian responsibility to reach out with love to such individuals and couples and encourage them to bring their lives into accord with Church standards. Until they do, however, we continue to fellowship them and to welcome them into our families and congregations.</i></p> <p><i>We also acknowledge that when our homosexual children enter into committed, monogamous relationships, whether sanctioned by law or otherwise, they are attempting to abide by a higher moral and</i></p>

given us no commandment that He will not give us the strength and power to observe. That is the Plan of Salvation for His children, and it is our duty to proclaim that plan, to teach its truth, and to praise God for the mission of His Son Jesus Christ. It is Christ's atonement that makes it possible for us to be forgiven of our sins and His resurrection that gives us the assurance of immortality and the life to come. It is that life to come that orients our views in mortality and reinforces our determination to live the laws of God so that we can qualify for His blessings in immortality.

social standard than those who live promiscuously. When they choose to enter into committed, monogamous relationships, our choice as parents and family members is to support them and to welcome them into full family fellowship. We accept what some of our children report: that in spite of the fact that they may live lives that are not fully in keeping with established Church policy and practice, they nevertheless feel they have a close relationship with God and with Christ. Many of them worship on their own or are active in other churches where they serve and minister to others. Many have chosen such sacred paths over more secular ones available to them. For many of them, as well as for those of us who are their family members, it is heartbreaking that they are not welcome into the congregations of their chosen faith (Mormonism). Many long for that fellowship. In other words, except for this one issue, many live lives completely in accord with gospel and Church principles. They and we look forward to a time when they might be able to worship in the congregations of their fathers and mothers.