

Mormon church blocks whistle-blower's access to baptism data

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(RNS) A technological crackdown has effectively blocked a prominent whistle-blower from accessing the Mormons' database that chronicles so-called baptisms for the dead.

Church officials said the move helps prevent overzealous Mormons and mischief-makers from violating church policy by submitting the names of prominent Jewish figures.

The decision to suspend the New FamilySearch accounts of anyone searching for Jewish Holocaust victims or celebrities also freezes out Utah researcher Helen Radkey, whose baptism discoveries have embarrassed the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for decades.

"I have been effectively stopped," says Radkey, who shared a log-in screen shot that reveals a red box reading: "Your account has been locked temporarily. Please try again later."

Radkey, who surreptitiously uses the account information of Mormon confidants, says the recent names she uncovered "shook church officials." Besides Anne Frank, Gandhi and slain Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, Radkey revealed that the parents of famed Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal had been baptized by proxy in Mormon temples.

"Obviously, they have been very concerned about the data that has been coming out and said, 'We have to do something about it,'" Radkey said.

Mormons believe that living people can be baptized on behalf of dead relatives and others, who then can either accept or reject the ordinance.

Asked whether the new restriction is directed at Radkey, LDS church spokesman Michael Purdy released the following statement:

The church is committed to preventing the misguided practice of submitting the names of Holocaust victims and prominent individuals for proxy baptism. ... Anyone trying to access names that have been restricted will have their account suspended and be required to contact FamilySearch to establish their family relationship in order to have their access reinstated. Abuse of the system will result in the permanent loss of database access.