

Mormon women seeking priesthood to be shut out of Temple Square

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SALT LAKE CITY (RNS) Mormon women seeking tickets to the faith's general priesthood session next month will not only be denied access to that all-male meeting, but also may be shut out of Salt Lake City's historic Temple Square altogether.

On Monday (March 17), the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints formally rebuffed Ordain Women's second push for entrance to the priesthood session and urged the grass-roots group to "demonstrate" instead in "free-speech zones adjacent to Temple Square, which have long been established for those wishing to voice differing viewpoints."

LDS officials also are barring news media cameras from the square during their two-day General Conference, which the church says is "consistent with long-standing policy."

A "large majority" of Mormon women do not share Ordain Women's "advocacy for priesthood ordination for women," church spokeswoman Jessica Moody wrote Monday (March 17) to the group's organizers. Such activism "detracts from the helpful discussions" that the LDS Church is having with others on women's issues, Moody added.

"Ordination of women to the priesthood is a matter of doctrine that is contrary to the Lord's revealed organization for his church," she said.

"We are disappointed that we weren't granted tickets," said Kate Kelly, one of the founders of Ordain Women.

Kelly, a practicing Latter-day Saint and human-rights attorney in Washington, D.C., took umbrage at the suggestion that Ordain Women and its allies take their place beside protesters who routinely picket the LDS Church during its General Conferences.

“We have nothing in common with those people,” says Kelly, who served an 18-month mission for the faith. “They are seeking to destroy the church. We are not against the church—we ARE the church.”

In October, more than 100 women sought to gain entrance to the all-male LDS priesthood meeting, held in the Conference Center across the street from Temple Square. They approached the Tabernacle door, where standby tickets were distributed. One by one, they asked for admittance. One by one, they were turned away—as news cameras captured the episode.

“We are going to go there again,” Kelly said.

And she does not expect to be barred in the attempt.

It would be “unprecedented to deny a group of faithful women entrance to Temple Square, a place that we consider holy ground,” Kelly said. “It would be extremely disconcerting.”

Moody’s letter invites the women to “view the live broadcast of the priesthood session on [lds.org](https://www.lds.org), the Mormon Channel or BYUtv.” Last fall, the LDS Church broadcast the all-male meeting live for the first time.

The church “has regretfully upped the ante,” said Steve Evans, a Salt Lake City attorney and Mormon blogger. “If it not only refuses entry to these women but also forces them off of Temple Square, the church may inadvertently send the message that it feels threatened by the Ordain Women movement.”

It’s also a “PR disaster for the church,” said Kristine Haglund, editor of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. “Goliath is never going to get better press than David—the optics are terrible.”

And unnecessary, she said, given that Ordain Women had announced that April’s conference would be the second and final time the group planned to seek priesthood tickets.

Even so, most Mormon women wouldn't be lining up for tickets or ordination. A 2011 Pew Research Center national survey found that 90 percent of LDS women and 84 percent of men oppose allowing women to enter the Mormon priesthood.

Nevertheless, the church's letter may have unwittingly created sympathy among some Mormons who were not ready to join the Ordain Women movement.

"Ordination is not my bosom-burning cause," wrote LDS scholar and writer Joanna Brooks at Feminist Mormon Housewives. "But I am tired of seeing women I love leave the faith because there is no serious, open respectful conversation within the church about issues that matter to them and because they are stigmatized and rejected when they dare to ask the questions. Today, again, the church sought to push out women who are asking the questions."

As to the question of Mormon doctrine, Kelly said there is "no scripture or statement by any prophet or apostle that says women cannot be ordained."

Kelly points to the LDS Church's ninth Article of Faith, which reads in part, "We believe that [God] will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God."

That could include ordination of women, she said. "That is what we are praying for."