

Mormon website promotes gentler tone toward gays

by [Peggy Fletcher Stack](#) in the [January 9, 2013](#) issue

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints isn't changing its tune about homosexuality, but it has launched a new website to alter the tone.

The site—unveiled Thursday (Dec. 6) and called "Love One Another: A Discussion on Same-Sex Attraction"—includes video clips of Mormon leaders as well as gay members and their families promoting compassion and understanding toward homosexuals, and encouraging everyone to be "disciples of Christ."

"Our hope with this site is that empathy will grow in families," LDS apostle D. Todd Christofferson says in one clip. "We're trying to communicate that our love is inclusive, that we want to have the family remain intact, and the relationships we've treasured over the years to remain and to grow."

It's important, the apostle says, "to recognize the feelings of a person, that they are real, that they are authentic, that we don't deny that someone feels a certain way."

Many gay rights activists, inside and outside the LDS church, applaud Mormonism's latest effort, which was unveiled December 6.

"This website is a tool, or resource, for LDS faithful for engaging in this topic," says Brandie Balkan, executive director of Equality Utah, a gay rights group. "It is important that the core is inclusion, understanding and compassion. It is my hope that we will see a difference in the lived experience of the LGBT (community), especially of our young people."

Mormon leaders have increasingly emphasized that Mormons not abandon or distance themselves from gay loved ones and have condemned bullying and homophobic rhetoric among members and in society at large.

The new site thrills newly elected state Sen. Jim Dabakis—Utah's Democratic Party boss, a onetime Mormon missionary and soon to be the only openly gay person in

the state Legislature. "I give tremendous credit to the LDS Church," Dabakis says. "This can't have been easy."

Laurie Campbell, who tells her story on the site, was nervous to participate but felt it would be a valuable gift to her fellow believers.

Campbell, of Boulder City, Nev., always knew she was a lesbian growing up in her Mormon family. She had three successive gay relationships, but, finally, decided to give up her partner and return to her faith. She subsequently married a man and had three children. More than 20 years ago, she wrote about the experience in a book called *Born That Way? A True Story of Overcoming Same-Sex Attraction With Insights for Friends, Families and Leaders*. Campbell used a pseudonym for that book, but is herself on the video.

"Same-sex attraction is not a sin," the website emphasizes, "but acting on it is." Mormon doctrine decrees that sex should only be between a husband and a wife. "It's no sin to have inclinations that if yielded to would produce behavior that would be a transgression," apostle Dallin H. Oaks says in an interview posted on the church's newsroom website. "The sin is in yielding to temptation."

Same-sex attraction is also "not an illness or a disease," LDS officials say in the new videos, noting that the church no longer encourages gay members to get married to someone of the opposite sex.

The new site also doesn't encourage Latter-day Saints to oppose legislation making gay marriage legal. Indeed, Dabakis notes the fact that the church "didn't get involved in any of the four races (gay marriage initiatives) that were on the (November) ballot—not one volunteer, not one dollar—is evidence of this kind of change, and our community has changed dramatically, too."

The new website has been in the works for more than two years, said LDS church spokesman Michael Purdy. —*Salt Lake Tribune*, RNS

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