



Local
Mind, Body & Soul
Sports
Archives

Editorials
Letters
Columnists
Message Boards

Our Picks
Calendar
Movies
Books

Horoscopes
Comics
Classifieds
Obituaries

Subscribe
Advertise
Contact Us

[FreeFind](#)

NEWS

Local
Mind, Body & Soul
Sports
Archives

OPINION

Editorials
Letters
Columnists
Message Boards

A&E

Our Picks

Local News

Restoration Church of Jesus Christ

by JoSelle Vanderhoof
joselle@slmetro.com

(Second in a six-part series on gay spirituality)

Like many gay and lesbian Latter-Day Saints, Bob McIntire left his church after coming out of the closet. But unlike several gay and lesbian former Mormons, he not only joined a new church, he became its president.

The new church was the Restoration Church of Jesus Christ (RCJC), a gay-friendly offshoot of Mormonism founded in 1985 by members of a Los Angeles Affirmation

Calendar
Movies
Books
LIVING
Horoscopes
Comics
Classifieds
Obituaries
Salt Lake METRO
Subscribe
Advertise
Contact Us

chapter, a support group for gay and lesbian Mormons. In the same year, McIntire met three of the fledgling church's members at a meeting of the Royal Court of the Golden Spike Empire, which McIntire was attending as the local Metropolitan Community Church's representative.

"Three men in business suits walked in and asked to be recognized," McIntire remembers. "When they were allowed to speak one of them got up and said, 'We're here to tell you that the Gospel of Jesus Christ as taught by Joseph Smith has been restored to the gay community.'" He laughs at the memory. "I just about fell out of my chair! At first I was a little bit angry, I think. Because I felt like, here's MCC trying to reach out and help people and this is just another group of Mormon wannabes who are going to... draw away from the MCC that was already struggling for existence."

Still, McIntire decided to attend the RCJC's first public meeting in Salt Lake City the following week. Here he says he "experienced some feelings I hadn't had since I left the LDS church." Shortly after, he decided to join. Within months he became the leader of Utah's RCJC congregation; and when then-RCJC President Antonio Feliz stepped down, the church asked McIntire to take his place. He's held the position ever since, despite the church's often troubled twenty-year history.

"It's had a lot of ups and downs," he says, referring to the Los Angeles chapter's decision to split from the RCJC in the mid-1990s and the disbanding of chapters in California, New Mexico and Texas. "I would say two years ago we were at our all time low. And from that point we started growing again. We are growing at the moment and I think we're going to continue to grow. I believe that it's something that is of value to many people. For those who grew up with an LDS background it fills a need."

According to Elder Larry Tidwell, presiding patriarch to the church and second counselor to the President, the RCJC initially filled a very real need for its founding members – most of who had been excommunicated from the LDS church because of their sexual orientations. These participants in an Affirmation chapter in Los Angeles bonded through a scripture study group, in which they made a startling discovery.

"In the course of studying the scriptures they came to the conclusion that the priesthood that many of them had been excommunicated from, that the church had told them they no longer had,... [ultimately] comes from God," he said. "It doesn't come from the church. And once they realized that, they also realized that the church can't take away their priesthood. Only God can."

Eventually, this realization lead some of the group's members, many of whom had had been excommunicated from the LDS church, to wonder if they should start their own church. At this time, says Tidwell, "they prayed very earnestly to receive direction about whether or not they should form a church. And the conclusion was that the Lord wanted them to form another church, so they did," originally naming themselves the Church of Jesus Christ of All Latter-Day Saints. When the LDS church in Los Angeles objected that the name was too similar to theirs, the group officially changed their name to the Restoration Church of Jesus Christ, though they still use "the name the Lord gave us" in "all our ordinances and ceremonies" which are similar to those performed by the LDS church and include temple marriages for straight, gay and lesbian couples.

Although the RCJC holds sacrament meetings, Sunday school and home teaching and upholds the "basic Mormon tenants" as found in the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the work Doctrine and Covenants, the church has a number of differences from the LDS faith. Along with familiar Mormon scriptures, the RCJC also uses their own book of scripture entitled Hidden Treasures and Promises. According to Tidwell, this book is similar to Doctrine and Covenants in that it contains "revelations given to the leadership of the Restored Church that they have written down and presented to members of the church."

Further, women "are total equals with the males of the church," according to Tidwell. They are able to "hold the priesthood" and have occupied every position in the church save for president. And while the RCJC has a prophet who serves as "prophet, seer and revelator," RCJC members do not see him as infallible.

"As a result of that, it is the members' duty to live their lives in such a way that they can have the Spirit be with them to determine whether or not the prophet is following the Lord," Tidwell explains.

Members of the church are also encouraged to use their own consciences in matters of faith, particularly in the case of the Word of Wisdom, the Mormon law of health which encourages members to abstain from such things as tobacco, alcohol, caffeine and immoderate consumption of meat.

"We also don't believe that the responsibility of the church to tell people what they should do in their private personal lives," Tidwell continues. "What tithing they should pay what the law of chastity means to them. We still believe in the word of wisdom. But how they should apply the Word of Wisdom is between them and the Lord. It's not the duty of the church to tell them. Basically [we] give them guidelines and principles and then let them decide how the principle applies to their lives."

Although the Restoration Church of Jesus Christ has never opened a formal dialogue

SEARCH NEWS

powered by

[FreeFind](#)

with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, according to Tidwell they don't believe the other church is a false religion.

"We believe the Lord can and does form other churches as there's a need," he says. "We still believe that since in the Book of Mormon it says there were many prophets in the land that there can be more than one prophet for the world. The leaders of the LDS church are prophets and we have prophets too. We encourage our members to follow our prophet and the teachings the Lord has given to us because they're unique to our people. But what the Lord tells President Hinckley is what the Lord is giving them [the LDS church] and guiding them in relation to their own ministry. We're not against them at all. We respect them and we appreciate their ministry."

Currently, the RCJC's ministry serves not only the Salt Lake chapter, but members from all over the world including Belgium, England and South Africa. The church uses the internet and "telephone conversations... as circumstances permit" to reach these long distance members. Additionally, the RCJC's website also includes information on a forthcoming Internet Sunday School, which the church is currently considering implementing.

Along with their worldwide membership, McIntire also says his church hopes to reach out to young people.

"We would really like to get some of the youth involved, the gay youth groups," he says. "Because I think the people that tend to be attracted to us are those who are a little bit older and perhaps went on missions for the LDS church. They already had a solid background in Mormonism before they discovered they were gay. Now we've got a whole crop of young people I see out there that haven't really gotten into their religion, so it's a lot easier for them to throw the whole thing out. I would like to find a way to appeal to those people and give them a place where they could come and express themselves religiously without thinking they had to give up their beliefs or their orientation."

"I've seen a lot of people in our community and in various gay communities who when they discover they're gay they throw out all their beliefs, especially if they have a strong religious belief," he continues. "Looking back on it now I think that's what I was trying to do [when I came out], but I could never shake it off. And then I found something where I don't have to throw out everything. I just have to throw out the parts that don't work for me. That's where the restoration church comes in."

Located at 2900 S. State Street, Restoration Church of Jesus Christ holds services every Sunday at 1:00 pm. The church can be reached on the internet at home.netcom.com/~utahdude/rcjc/rcjc.html and by telephone at 359-1151.