

## Gay Mormons seek 'affirmation' from LDS leaders

'Homosexuality is not a sin,' says group

By Peggy Fletcher Stack  
The Salt Lake Tribune  
Salt Lake Tribune

Article Last Updated: 9 August 2008

Leaders of Affirmation, a support group for gay Mormons, want LDS general authorities to make a clear, unambiguous statement in the church's annual General Conference that homosexuality is not a sin or a disease and that mothers don't cause it.

They want the church to teach Mormon families to love and respect their gay sons and daughters, help gays and lesbians feel safe at church and to reconcile their sexual orientation and their spirituality.

Affirmation had planned to make these points Monday when they were scheduled to meet with two LDS officials from the church's social services, but last month the church postponed the meeting indefinitely, said Dave Melson, Affirmation's assistant executive director, on Saturday.

Instead, the LDS gay support group will present its proposals to the public at a Monday press conference.

Too many LDS gays are shunned by their families and end up homeless, or commit suicide., Melson said during a session on gay spirituality at the annual Sunstone Symposium, an independent forum for Mormon thought. "This is not about blame. The past is the past. This about finding solutions."

Affirmation requested the meeting in February, shortly after Thomas S. Monson became president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The group received a reply from Fred Riley, LDS Family Services commissioner, saying Monson had authorized him and former commissioner Harold Brown to set up the meeting. Riley has since left his position, which was the reason given for the postponement.

But Melson is not discouraged.

"President Monson is a very, very good man," he said. "We believe we can work together. We want to move forward without recrimination. I believe that is what the savior would do."

Four other LDS gays spoke at Sunstone, including Olin Thomas, Affirmation's executive director, Micah Bisson, the group's youth director, George Cole, its young adults chairman, and David Nielson, president of Reconciliation, a "gay-positive, LDS-positive" group with ties to Affirmation.

Several mentioned their disappointment at not being a full-time missionary for the LDS Church.

"I wanted to serve a mission in a bad way," Cole said, "but I came out [as gay], moved to Portland, told my story to the 'home teacher' and a few months later I was excommunicated."

When Nielson couldn't serve a mission, he was so devastated that he made a list of reasons to continue living or end it. He stopped going to church and tried to explore spirituality on his own, he said. "The thing I always wanted was for someone to stand up for me at church. But no one did."

Eventually, though, Nielsen was drawn back to Mormonism.

"I am hopeful that as time goes on, things will continue to shift both in our perceptions and in the way we are perceived by the church," he said. "We shouldn't have to choose between our faith and our sexuality." -

[pstack@sltrib.com](mailto:pstack@sltrib.com)