

Gay support group outlines requests to LDS Church

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Had a gay LDS support group met with LDS Church representatives Monday morning as scheduled, it would have asked the church to affirm its recent statements on homosexuality in the upcoming general conference.

Though church leaders have stated that being attracted to a member of the same sex is not a sin, rank-and-file members—particularly bishops who counsel with gay and lesbian members—have not "absorbed" the message, said Olin Thomas, executive director of Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons. Consequently, he said, gay members continue to encounter threatening, even hostile, church environments.

"The issues surrounding same-gender attraction deserve careful attention, not public posturing," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints responded in a statement released on Monday.

In a meeting requested by Affirmation, David Melson, Affirmation assistant executive director and Thomas were to sit down Monday morning with the head of LDS Family Services, who had been asked by LDS Church President Thomas S. Monson to represent the church. But the church postponed the meeting after LDS Family Services director Fred C. Riley left his position.

"It has always been the intent of the church to engage in an open and honest discussion with Affirmation leaders to listen to their concerns. When the church was originally approached by Affirmation, church officials offered a much earlier meeting date. The meeting was put on hold until August at Affirmation's request. The church asked for the same courtesy as it hires a new director of Family Services, a position crucial to this conversation," the church statement said.

Affirmation leaders said they called the news conference to get information out and move the discussion forward. "I would like to see the church become a safe haven for all its members," Melson said.

"It appears from Affirmation's actions today that it has opted for a public rather than private exchange," said the church statement.

In addition to wanting a general conference talk on the church's position toward gays, Melson outlined other items on the group's agenda.

Affirmation wants a female church leader to address mothers to let them know they're not responsible for their children's sexuality. Melson said guilt is a "huge problem" for mothers of gay children.

The group also wants to meet with a member of the First Presidency or the Quorum of the Twelve and to invite a general authority to speak at its 2009 conference.

Affirmation wants to work with the church to develop resource materials for bishops to better and more consistently deal with gay and lesbian members who seek counseling.

The group also intended to give a letter to President Monson concerning future discussions, for which he could give as much or as little publicity as he preferred.

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