



October 6, 2010

An Open Letter To Members of the LDS Community,

On behalf of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Affirmative Psychotherapist Guild of Utah, it is our professional responsibility to respond to statements made by Elder Boyd K. Packer at the most recent LDS General Conference. We are deeply saddened and concerned about his comments. This letter is an appeal for an alternate and more compassionate approach to dealing with the emotionally complex realities of sexual orientation and religious beliefs.

Many people of the LDS faith are in turmoil and confusion due to conflicts between their own or their family member's sexual orientation and their religious beliefs. Elder Packer's comments continue to endorse that the only option for acceptance for LDS sexual minorities is to become heterosexual. This, however, requires many who are in conflict with this issue to endure an earthly life of torment and rejection. For some, unfortunately, the only way they know how to end this distress may be suicide.

For families and individuals who are struggling with the sexual orientation of a family member, it should be pointed out that an uncompassionate, rejecting approach has severe consequences: young people who receive rejection and non-acceptance by their families are at greater risk for suicide. As current research confirms, they are also more at risk for depression, more often use illegal drugs, and are at higher risk for HIV and STDs, compared to their LGBTQ peers who are treated affirmatively about their sexual orientation.

At a time when individuals and families were beginning to feel hopeful about the church's emerging commitment to compassion and understanding, Elder Packer's statements undermine this progress. He has only deepened the anguishing dilemmas for members of the faith who must now choose between their genuine love for family members and their religion.

As mental-health professionals we are committed to respecting the importance of religious faith. There are many people of various religious faiths – including many within the LDS faith - who do not reject LGBTQ individuals and families. We invite church members to remain open in considering ways to integrate reliable research with the tenets of faith in resolving human dilemmas. This collaboration could provide a necessary bridge for those in conflict to finally experience peace, connection, and personal value.

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