

Transcript of Elder D. Todd Christofferson Interview:

Segment A: 0 min 54 sec

Michael Otterson, Managing Director, Church Public Affairs: *How would you describe your role as a Church leader?*

Elder D. Todd Christofferson, Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: *Well, the responsibilities, of course, include administrative matters, but first and foremost, it's a ministry. And we, my colleagues and I, travel across the world in many places, in many circumstances doing what the Lord commanded Peter to do and feed His sheep. And these questions that have arisen, we're sympathetic to. They're difficult, they're sensitive, they tug at the heartstrings and they're very real. And this is about family; this is about love and especially the love of the Savior and how He wants people to be helped and fed and lifted, and that's the whole motivation that underlies our effort.*

Segment B: 0 min 56 sec

Michael Otterson: *On November the 5, the Church made some changes to its handbook in relation to same-sex marriage and its policy towards the children of same-sex marriage partners. Could you explain why that was necessary?*

Elder Christofferson: *We regard same-sex marriage as a particularly grievous or significant, serious kind of sin that requires Church discipline. It means the discipline is mandatory — doesn't dictate outcomes but it dictates that discipline is needed in those cases. It's a statement to remove any question or doubt that may exist. We recognize that same-sex marriages are now legal in the United States and some other countries and that people have the right, if they choose, to enter into those, and we understand that. But that is not a right that exists in the Church. That's the clarification.*

Segment C: 2 min 21 sec

Michael Otterson: *So in the last couple of years there's been a tone from the Church of understanding and acceptance of those people who experience same-sex attraction, and this policy seemed to be rather abrupt. What actually prompted this handbook change?*

Elder Christofferson: *To some degree it came from questions that have surfaced in different parts of the world and the United States. With the Supreme Court's decision in the United States, there was a need for a distinction to be made between what may be legal and what may be the law of the Church and the law of the Lord and how we respond to that. So it's a matter of being clear; it's a matter of understanding right and wrong; it's a matter of a firm policy that doesn't allow for question or doubt. We think it's possible and mandatory, incumbent upon us as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, to yield no ground in the matter of love and sympathy and help and brotherhood and serving in doing all we can for anybody; at the same time*

maintaining the standards He maintained. That was the Savior's pattern. He always was firm in what was right and wrong. He never excused or winked at sin. He never redefined it. He never changed His mind. It was what it was and is what it is and that's where we are, but His compassion, of course, was unexcelled and His desire and willingness and proactive efforts to minister, to heal, to bless, to lift and to bring people toward the path that leads to happiness never ceased. That's where we are. We're not going to stop that. We're not going to yield on our efforts to help people find what brings happiness, but we know sin does not. And so we're going to stand firm there because we don't want to mislead people. There's no kindness in misdirecting people and leading them into any misunderstanding about what is true, what is right, what is wrong, what leads to Christ and what leads away from Christ.

Segment D: 2 min 44 sec

Michael Otterson: *Why are the children of these same-sex partners an issue here?*

Elder Christofferson: *Well, in answering or responding to your question, let me say I speak not only as an apostle in the Church, but as a husband, as a father and as a grandfather. And like others in those more enduring callings, I have a sense of compassion and sympathy and tender feelings that they do. So this policy originates out of that compassion. It originates from a desire to protect children in their innocence and in their minority years. When, for example, there is the formal blessing and naming of a child in the Church, which happens when a child has parents who are members of the Church, it triggers a lot of things. First, a membership record for them. It triggers the assignment of visiting and home teachers. It triggers an expectation that they will be in Primary and the other Church organizations. And that is likely not going to be an appropriate thing in the home setting, in the family setting where they're living as children where their parents are a same-sex couple. We don't want there to be the conflicts that that would engender. We don't want the child to have to deal with issues that might arise where the parents feel one way and the expectations of the Church are very different. And so with the other ordinances on through baptism and so on, there's time for that if, when a child reaches majority, he or she feels like that's what they want and they can make an informed and conscious decision about that. Nothing is lost to them in the end if that's the direction they want to go. In the meantime, they're not placed in a position where there will be difficulties, challenges, conflicts that can injure their development in very tender years.*

The situation with polygamist families, for example, and same-sex marriage couples and families really has a parallel. For generations we've had these same kinds of policies that relate to children in polygamist families that we wouldn't go forward with these ordinances while they're in that circumstance and before they reach their majority. That's the same sort of situation we're dealing with here, so it's something we have had a history with. It's a practice that really is analogous that's been the case over many generations.

Segment E: 1 min 4 sec

Michael Otterson: *There is also provisional requirement for a person who has reached the age of maturity who maybe wants to serve a mission in the Church, but who has come from a same-sex marriage relationship, family. There is a requirement for them to disavow the idea of same-sex marriage. Not disavow their parents, but same-sex marriage. What was the thinking behind that?*

Elder Christofferson: *Well again, this is a parallel with polygamy. Anyone coming out of a polygamous setting who wants to serve a mission, it has to be clear that they understand that is wrong and is sin and cannot be followed. They disavow the practice of plural marriage. And that would be the same case here. They would disavow, or assent I guess would be a better way to say it, to the doctrines and practices of the Church with regards to same-sex marriage. So they would be saying, as you said, not disavowing their parents, but disavowing the practice.*

Segment F: 1 min 19 sec

Michael Otterson: *Elder Christofferson, a lot of attention has been given over the last year or so to the Church's very prominent outreach and message on being fair to everyone — the idea of "fairness for all," and that phrase has been used a lot. How does the fairness for all approach, particularly in relation to same-gender attraction, fit in this particular conversation?*

Elder Christofferson: *Very consistently. This is really two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, we have worked with others and will continue to do so to protect rights and employment and housing and that sort of thing for all. And on the other hand, there needs to be respect and acknowledgment of the rights of the religious community to set its standards and to live according to them and to teach and abide by its own doctrines, such as regards marriage in this case. The Church of course doesn't attempt to practice mind control, and people have varying opinions. It's only a problem if there is advocacy and people lobby and advocate against the standard and the very clear and expressed position of the Church as it has been stated repeatedly, and again now.*

Segment G: 0 min 57 sec

Michael Otterson: *There are other ordinances like blessing of the sick when a baby is sick. Does this policy also exclude that kind of blessing, or is it only the formal membership?*

Elder Christofferson: *When we are talking about blessings, priesthood blessings, given to those who are ill or want a blessing of comfort or guidance, that's open to all. We would expect that to be done throughout their lifetime, from infancy on as long as that's the desire of the parents and of the child. That's something we are anxious to provide.*

Michael Otterson: *So if there was a grandfather, for example, who, with the permission of the parents wanted to bless a grandchild, that would be permissible, in terms of a healing blessing or blessing for sickness?*

Elder Christofferson: *Certainly. Certainly. Where there is any kind of need for blessing, for counsel, for help of whatever kind, that can be offered; we want to do that.*