



Proclaiming the Family Proclamation: When Doctrine Is Clear but Messaging Isn't

By [Matthew Watkins](#)

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The Family Proclamation stands firm, even as institutions, campuses, and congregations blur its message.

I've always been an odd duck. Most kids played soccer during recess; I preferred reading and discussing theology. As a young adult, I discovered FAIR (a leading organization for Latter-day Saint scholarship and apologetics). Now, my annual pilgrimage to Utah for their conference is a highlight of my year.

Latter-day Saint apologetics is a niche hobby, however—one my friends have found uninteresting ... until now. Over the past two weeks, many have reached out, saying they watched FAIR presentations and want to attend next year's conference. What sparked this newfound curiosity? The old adage: "There's no such thing as bad publicity."

“Do you support the Family Proclamation?” A FAIR (and crucial) question.

The conference experienced significant controversy this year. The keynote speaker—the Church of Jesus Christ’s lead spokesman—was asked two key questions during the Q&A. First, whether he supported the Family Proclamation, and later, how to minister to LGBT+ individuals while standing for the Family Proclamation. For many individuals listening both live and online, his responses seemed unsettlingly evasive. Within hours, the Latter-day Saint online world had ignited in fierce debates over church hiring practices and public discipleship. But one question towered above them all: Is the Church distancing itself from the Family Proclamation?

Let’s consider some history: In 2007, only a quarter of Latter-day Saints considered homosexual behavior “acceptable.” Over the next seven years, [that number grew to over a third](#). One year ago, support within our faith for same-sex behavior reached 46%, with 41% endorsing same-sex marriage itself. And the “T” in LGBT is hot on its heels: only 55% of Latter-day Saints today view the rapid rise in transgenderism as a negative for society.

Is it true that the Church is drifting from the principles of the Family Proclamation?

This shift in social views tends to shift religious views. Many online—especially young adults—believe Church teachings are simply wrong. “The Prophets are good men, but limited by their biases.” Many express an eager anticipation of the day when a new generation of younger, more open-minded leaders takes the reins and finally receives a revelation permitting same-sex sealings and gender fluidity in the Church.

“In fact,” they tell me, “that shift is already starting to take place.”

Mixed Messages

Is it true that the Church is drifting from the principles of the Family Proclamation? Even faithful members may wonder. The FAIR Q&A is just one in a pattern of mixed signals that contribute to confusion. A few examples emerging from church-adjacent institutions, administrative voices, and local leaders during the past five years:

During the 2021 BYU Women’s Conference, the Church Relief Society General Presidency invited a prominent queer activist who [publicly rejects the Family Proclamation](#) onto the stage to speak to all the women of the Church. While on stage, she [urged the use of transgender pronouns](#), and the presidency commended her message.

Around this time in Arizona, a man who identifies as a woman investigated the Church. The mission knowingly sent *sister* missionaries to teach him alone. He was delighted that the missionaries, members, and ward leaders affirmed his gender identity. When he received First Presidency approval for baptism in 2022, [the mission created a female membership record for him](#), making him an official member of his ward’s Relief Society.

Later in 2022, after Congress proposed legislation codifying same-sex marriage, the Church released [an official statement seeming to endorse the bill](#). Surprised members who had earlier sacrificed to support Proposition 8 at the Church’s behest now wondered: “What happened to ‘calling upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote’ the principles of the Family Proclamation?”

During a stake devotional three months after the law’s passage, President Dallin H. Oaks [clarified the Church’s statement](#). The original wording was ambiguous; the Church had only endorsed *adding religious freedom amendments to the bill*—not the whole bill itself. But this clarification went largely unnoticed. Most members only read the headlines accompanying the original statement, and now believe the Church supports same-sex marriage as a full civil right.

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Mixed messaging bleeds into church-owned institutions, too. Deseret Book, for example, produces [allyship podcasts](#) and [sells books encouraging parents to transition young children](#). But perhaps nowhere among church institutions has the mixed messaging been so prevalent as at “the Lord’s university,” BYU. [Faculty and department leaders](#) have distributed LGBT+ pride materials to students. A [professor shreds the Family Proclamation](#). Some teachers [hang pride flags in classrooms](#), while some officials [lead LGBT+ activism groups](#). Contributors at BYU’s Maxwell Institute [endorse “Queer Mormon Theology,” while slamming Elder Jeffrey R.](#)

Holland's call for faithfulness. And just last year, BYU's Wheatley Institute invited a gay activist to speak on campus. He praised the Church for dropping the gay marriage fight and urged the Church to make further concessions on social issues, drawing strong applause from the audience.

Adding to our institutional confusion is what members see and hear within our own wards and stakes. We've seen pride displays in chapel foyers, bishops instructing members to use transgender pronouns, and Sunday School teachers quietly striking lessons on the Family Proclamation from their class schedules.

I've seen this shift even in my heavily Conservative area of the US. A Bishopric assigned a brother to speak on a recent talk from a member of the First Presidency, then changed the assignment at the last minute, apologetically explaining, "We hadn't read that talk before we assigned it. Some members in our ward struggle with the talk's views on LGBT+ topics, and we don't want controversy in our meetings."

During a testimony meeting I attended this June, a freshly returned missionary began her testimony with a rousing "Happy Pride Month!" She then bore witness that God doesn't care whether we keep the commandments because He loves us so much. The Bishop didn't correct the record, and none of the following speakers offered a clarifying voice.

It seems that if you teach "affirmation" lessons from Instagram influencers, everyone will politely (maybe enthusiastically) smile along. But if you read the Family Proclamation to your class, you might be called into your Bishop's office and counseled to avoid "divisive" topics.

It leaves many wondering: *Is being nice more important than speaking truth?*

Church leaders are well aware of this problem. In 2021, Pres. Jeffrey R. Holland read one of the numerous letters he had received from parents feeling "abandoned and betrayed by BYU" because of the "radicalizing of [students'] attitudes and the destruction of [students'] faith" by "flag-waving and parade-holding" activist staff members.

During a worldwide devotional two years later, Pres. Oaks shared one of many letters he had received from frustrated youth about "inconsistent and confusing messages from the

Church,” including being asked for pronouns at church activities and being asked to dance with youth of the same gender. “I truly don’t understand why so many youth in our church don’t see any problem with people changing their gender every other day [or] dating people who are the same sex ... I wish we heard more talk from Church leaders about this problem.”

It’s hard to be bombarded by voices of friends, scholars, and influencers saying, “**change in church teachings is just around the corner.**” But when even sources that seem “official” start to echo that message, youth and adults alike start to wonder if the shift really is coming. And a logical question follows: Why defend the Family Proclamation today if our leaders will just surrender it tomorrow?

The doctrine stands. Will we?

Are the critics right? Is the ground shifting beneath our feet? The answer is an emphatic no, not as long as we focus on the authoritative sources. We must not repeat Peter’s fatal mistake walking on the water: *he took his eyes off the Master and began to focus on the turbulence around him.* When our own cultural crosscurrents grow “boisterous,” the Lord’s counsel remains unchanged: “Look unto me in every thought.” We don’t look to influencers, scholars, podcasters, or even Church personnel and local leaders—we look unto *Him*.

His saving doctrine is not crowdsourced. While subordinates may send mixed signals and some local leaders might waver on this issue, the Prophets and Apostles speak with crystal clarity. The Lord’s mouthpieces have taught the doctrine of the family in every dispensation of the Gospel from Adam to the present time, and they reaffirm it constantly in their official capacity today. *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, in particular, has been cited in General Conference *every single year* since it was written.

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Contrary to what dismissive critics may say, church leaders are not yielding to pressure, ignoring the issue, or passively waiting for God to change their course. As Pres. Holland said, “We have spent more time and shed more tears on this subject than we could *ever* adequately convey to you ... We have spent *hours* [discussing what the doctrine of the Church can and cannot provide](#)” those who struggle with this issue.”

Prophets, Seers, and Revelators are sympathetic to the desire for change. But they understand that the Proclamation isn’t “a changeable statement of policy—[it’s] [irrevocable doctrine](#).” None of the protests, the social pressure, or the mixed messaging matters because “[the doctrine of the Lord regarding marriage and morality cannot be changed](#).” This fundamental law is as necessary to our spiritual existence as gravity or thermodynamics are to our mortal existence.

The question isn’t whether the doctrine of the family will change; it’s whether we will stand with it. Remember, in Lehi’s vision, worldly distractions *begin* at the great and spacious building, but they don’t *stay* there. Babylon’s influence reaches all the way to the tree of life itself, causing many to feel ashamed and “[rehearse their doubts](#)” to everyone else.

We all lean on the strength of our fellow ward members, but new and struggling members are especially reliant on the faith of those around them. So, when a comment in Sunday School injects worldly ideology into the lesson and everyone in the class smiles along, a struggling student may conclude that the viewpoint represents the consensus of the class, and maybe the Church itself. That perceived unanimity can be *troublesome* for someone still struggling to build their own firm foundation.

Fortunately, all it takes is one voice to break that illusion of unanimity. You will find that when you are that “one voice”—either in person or online—others will privately thank you for speaking the message they needed to hear. Stand confident in the solidity of the doctrine. Prophets, Seers, and Revelators continue to proclaim truths of *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*. Surely we can, too.

About the author

Matthew Watkins

Matthew Watkins is a Latter-day Saint blogger, podcaster, Gospel nerd, and software engineer. Matthew regularly writes his thoughts about the Gospel on his blog and hosts the Conference Talk Podcast.