

NEWS

PROPOSITION 8 PASSES, TRIGGERS MASSIVE PROTESTS AGAINST LDS CHURCH

MERE DAYS AFTER PASSAGE of California's Proposition 8, for which Latter-day Saints had campaigned assiduously, the LDS Church confronted massive demonstrations of opposition, with thousands of protesters picketing outside temples across the United States. Proposition 8, a constitutional amendment that bans same-sex marriage in California, was passed by 52 percent of voters after Latter-day Saints contributed upwards of \$20 million to the "Yes on 8" campaign. Latter-day Saints also contributed \$3 million to a similar campaign that succeeded in Arizona.

Mormons became the most visible and best-organized members of a conservative coalition supporting Proposition 8 after the First Presidency sent a letter to California Mormons urging them to "do all you can" to overturn a recent decision by the California Supreme Court allowing same-sex couples to marry.

The protests that followed the passage of Proposition 8 are the largest show of opposition to the LDS Church in recent decades. Demonstrations were held at LDS temples in Los Angeles, Oakland, San Diego, Salt Lake City, Manhattan, and Mesa.

Other Proposition 8-related acts targeting the Church, include the mailing of white powder to the Los Angeles Temple, the Salt Lake Temple, and an LDS seminary building in Syracuse, Utah. The glass doors of several LDS meetinghouses in Utah's Davis and Weber counties were shattered with a BB gun. At a Farmington, Utah, meetinghouse, someone sprayed the message "Nobody is born a biggot" [sic] on a concrete wall. Police did not characterize these incidents as hate crimes because



of a lack of direct evidence regarding intent.

Meridian Magazine, an LDS-related website that posted several articles in support of Proposition 8, was hacked the day after Proposition 8 passed. According to *Meridian Magazine* founder Scott Proctor, the homepage was replaced with "horrible, explicit lesbian films." The website was down for half a day as engineers removed the offensive material. "We feel like this was a very specific targeting," said *Meridian* cofounder Maurine Proctor. Every time we post something [about same-sex marriage], we get a few dozen letters with the same tone, similar wording, and the most horrible language."]

PROTESTS AT TEMPLE SITES

IN CALIFORNIA, SOME 3,000 protesters, many gay and lesbian, marched to the Los Angeles Temple in Westwood to protest LDS support for Proposition 8, blocking the busy Santa Monica Boulevard and forcing the temple to close its doors. Some signs the protesters carried, "Stop the Mormons," "Mormon Cult," and

"Joseph Smith Prophet Polygamist Pedophile." The protest resulted in two arrests and other minor incidents.

In Oakland, 400 people assembled outside the LDS Temple, forcing highway patrol officers to close two freeway ramps to protect the marchers. Signs read "Separate Church and Hate," "1 Mormon 7 Wives?" and "Yes 2 Love, No 2 Hate." LDS services usually held in the adjacent stake center were moved to nearby chapels.

In San Diego, a smaller group protested near the temple there. "Mormon Love, Sacred?" read one sign depicting a man with seven wives. Stephen Murdock, one demonstrator, complained that "the Mormon Church is a small percentage in California, and yet they raised the largest percentage of funds against the gay population, and I totally disagree with it."

In Arizona, demonstrators held a peaceful vigil across the street during the lighting of the Christmas displays at the Mesa Temple. "It's time to get the Church out of politics and out of our bedrooms," said protestor Tom Kach. "Their God doesn't

rule my world; my God loves and accepts everyone for who they are."

One of the largest protests took place at the Manhattan Temple, where thousands congregated on 12 November. Signs asked, "Should We Sit in the Back of the Bus, Too?" and "Can I Vote on Your Marriage?" Oscar-winning actress Whoopi Goldberg joined the demonstration with a sign that read, "For My Friends, Equal Rights." Adam Abernathy, a gay man from Westchester County, carried a sign reading, "I (Heart) My Gay Mormon Husband!"

Asked why the protesters were targeting the LDS temple when other religious groups had campaigned for Proposition 8 as well, organizer Corey Johnson explained that that "the Mormon Church distinguished itself from all other anti-gay groups by getting their congregations to contribute more than \$20 million in their campaign of homophobia."

"The anger [of the protestors] is not towards Mormons," Johnson added, "but rather towards the leaders of the Mormon Church, who purposely spread lies about gays and lesbians to create an atmosphere of fear and hatred."

RALLY AND MARCH IN SALT LAKE CITY

IN SALT LAKE City, approximately 3,500 people, including Mormons and former Mormons, gathered for a rally and march around Temple Square. Crowd members held signs that read, "Separate Church and State," "Gay Rights Are Civil Rights," and "Keep Your Doctrine out of My Covenants."

The event was organized by Jacob Whipple, a former

Mormon who served a mission in Argentina. Whipple was planning to marry his fiancé Drew Cloud, from Orange County, California, on April 2009. He says they will go ahead with the ceremony anyway “whether it’s recognized or not.”

“Gays are people too,” Whipple said. “We’re your neighbors, your friends . . . We deserve every right everyone else has.”

Former Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson was one of the speakers at the City Creek Park gathering. Drawing a comparison with the ban that once prevented interracial couples from marrying, Anderson called Mormon support of Proposition 8 “a repeat of a tragic, a deplorable history.”

“Let us all call for a greater love, better understanding, dignity and respect toward all,” Anderson said, “regardless of race, regardless of faith or lack of faith, and regardless of sexual orientation.”

In Temple Square, protesters encountered a group of counter-protesters, many of them non-LDS. “The people voted,” some shouted at the protesters; “you are intolerant!” Others shouted, “Marriage is between a man and a woman. You’ll never be a man and a woman!”

At the north entrance to Temple Square, five Church members gathered to sing hymns and peacefully discuss their beliefs with the protesters.

BOYCOTT

SOME OPPONENTS OF Proposition 8 have called for boycotts of Mormon-related businesses or business and events in Utah. Among the targets are Marriott hotels, Cinemark theaters, and the Sundance Film Festival.

In Los Angeles, 200 gays and lesbians mounted a noisy protest in front of El Coyote Cafe on Beverly Boulevard, a restaurant with a strong gay and lesbian clientele. Activists complained that Marjorie Christoffersen, a

manager at the restaurant and the daughter of the owner, made a \$100 donation to the Yes on 8. Christoffersen is LDS.

In Sacramento, Scott Eckern, the Mormon artistic director of the California Musical Theater, resigned after gay and lesbian artists threatened a boycott because of his monetary support of Proposition 8. Eckern, who spent 25 years with the company, contributed \$1,000.

“I honestly had no idea that this would be the reaction,” Eckern said in a public statement. “I chose to act upon my belief that the traditional definition of marriage should be preserved . . . I was required by law to identify my employer and occupation at the time of my donation.”



Some in the gay community have also considered boycotting the enterprises of Alan Stock and Richard Raddon, two Mormons who contributed to the Yes on 8 campaign and who work with the movie industry. Cinemark chief executive Alan Stock donated almost \$10,000 to the Yes on 8 campaign. One of Stock’s Cinemark theaters is a venue for the Sundance Film Festival held every winter in Park City. Director of the Los Angeles Film Festival, Richard Raddon, also a Latter-day Saint, donated \$1,500 to Yes on 8.

In response to plans for a boy-

cott of the Marriott hotel chain, chairman and CEO Bill Marriott, who is LDS, posted a message to his blog distancing himself from Proposition 8.

“Some might conclude given my family’s membership in the Mormon Church that our company supported the recent ballot initiative to ban same-sex marriage in California,” Marriott wrote. “This is simply untrue. Marriott International is a public company headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland, and is not controlled by any one individual or family. Neither I, nor the company, contributed to the campaign to pass Proposition 8.”

“The Bible that I love teaches me about honesty, integrity and unconditional love for all

Californians Against Hate, alleges that the Church failed to report money invested to organize phone banks, send out direct mailers, provide transportation to California, mobilize a speakers bureau, send out satellite simulcasts, develop websites, and help produce commercial and video broadcasts.

In response, the Church stated that Krager’s complaint has “many errors and misstatements,” and that the Church has “fully complied with the reporting requirements of the California Political Reform Act.”

MORMONS ON THE OTHER SIDE

DESPITE THE FORMIDABLE LDS support of Proposition 8 during the campaign, a number of Mormons voiced their support for same-sex marriage. Among these were members of Affirmation: Gay & Lesbian Mormons and several grassroots groups that organized largely via the Internet.

Barbara Young, wife of former San Francisco 49ers’ Hall of Fame quarterback Steve Young, posted two official No on 8 signs in the windows of their home in Palo Alto and three Halloween-themed signs urging people to reject the gay marriage ban. Barbara Young also donated approximately \$50,000 to the No on 8 campaign. “We believe all families matter, and we do not believe in discrimination,” she wrote in an e-mail to a local TV station. “Therefore, our family will vote against Proposition 8.”

According to a story posted at www.affirmation.org, several members who publicly expressed opposition to Proposition 8 were disciplined or threatened with discipline in California, Georgia, Hawaii, Nebraska, and Utah. Andrew Callahan, from Hastings, Nebraska, was summoned by his stake president for a disciplinary council, but the court was postponed after Callahan went public with his story.

“We have decided to defer

people,” Marriott added. “But beyond that, I am very careful about separating my personal faith and beliefs from how we run our business.”

CALIFORNIANS AGAINST HATE FILE COMPLAINT

CALIFORNIA’S FAIR POLITICAL Practices, a state bi-partisan commission, said it will investigate allegations that the LDS Church failed to report nonmonetary contributions to the Yes on 8 campaign. Complainant Fred Krager, who heads the anti-Proposition 8 organization

your disciplinary council to a later date given this politically charged election season,” wrote stake president Weldon Sleight in an e-mail to Callahan. “We feel that a more measured and considered discussion can be held at a date sometime in November.”

On 17 October, Andrew Callahan, along with some 50 Mormons belonging to the group Signing for Something, gathered at Church headquarters in Salt Lake City to deliver 300 letters and a petition opposing LDS campaigning for Proposition 8. The marchers included Peter Danzig, a former member of the Orchestra at Temple Square who was suspended from the orchestra because of his letter to the *Salt Lake Tribune* opposing Proposition 8. Danzig later resigned his Church membership.

“We . . . have diverse views about the issue of same-gender marriages but we stand united in the belief that each individual should have the civil right to marry the spouse of their choice and to have that union recognized by civil authorities,” the petition from Signing for Something reads. “We ask that the leaders of the [LDS Church] cease their political organizing efforts and financial support of attempts to use the government to restrict the secular and religious rights of gay and lesbian individuals and publicly retract their request that members of the LDS Church support such measures.”

Kim Farah, of LDS Public Affairs, received the letters and petition outside the entrance to the Church Office Building and made a statement to the media. “[The Church] understands that this issue affects people in very private, individual ways,” she said. “However, the Church does have a moral obligation to speak out on issues that affect the moral fabric of society as it has in this case.”

After 4 November, Signing for Something began inviting



CHRIS DETRICK / THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

Mormons to resign their membership from the LDS Church. Signing for Something is asking members to state in their letters to Church authorities that their resignation is motivated by the Church’s stance against marriage equality. Callahan says the site has been contacted by 500 people announcing their resignation from the Church.

Mormons for Marriage, a coalition of Latter-day Saints who opposed the Mormon stance on Proposition 8, posted to their website a number of video clips in which several straight Latter-day Saints expressed their support of same-sex marriage. Some of the clips were removed after the individuals who made them had been threatened with ecclesiastical discipline.

“We named this site ‘Mormons for Marriage’ because we believe that monogamy and marriage are among the highest, and most sacred institutions in this life,” reads a webpage at MormonsForMarriage.com.

“Marriage increases levels of commitment, health and happiness among homosexuals, just as it does for heterosexuals, while decreasing the risks of disease and death not just for them, but for the population as a whole. Committed, quality marriages have a stabilizing effect on society. It just makes no sense to deny these benefits to homosexuals willing to step up to the responsibilities inherent in a committed re-

lationship.”

[The site also reads, “Just as progressive LDS Church members in the 1960s and 1970s had an opportunity to speak out on the denial of priesthood to blacks—this is our chance, in our day, to express our thoughts and feelings (respectfully) in support of gays within the LDS Church, and of gay marriage within the U.S. (and abroad).”]

Shortly before the vote on Proposition 8, LDS and non-LDS families gathered for a vigil in Salt Lake City in support of their gay children. Similar vigils were held in Provo and St. George.

The Salt Lake City event was organized by a group of Mormon mothers. Millie Watts, who is LDS and has two gay children, was one of the speakers at the Salt Lake City vigil held by the city’s public library.

“I am so touched that you would be here,” Watts said in tears to the 600 people gathered. “This is what happens when people in California say mean things about our gay kids. The mothers come out of the closet.”

Shortly after Election Day, the executive committee of Affirmation: Gay & Lesbian Mormons issued a statement expressing disappointment over the involvement of the LDS Church. “Affirmation is . . . saddened by the role that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints played in this process, and the harm that the Church has done to itself in California,

across the United States, and around the world,” executive director Olin Thomas wrote. “That the leaders of the Church seem to not understand the damage that has been done, the depth and breadth of emotion that has been unleashed, or the hurt that has been inflicted is tragic.”

VICTIMS TURNED INTO AGGRESSORS?

SEVERAL OBSERVERS NOTED the irony that the LDS Church, which was once persecuted for practicing polygamy, now wants to ban another nontraditional definition of marriage.

“You might think that an organization that for most of the first of its not yet two centuries of existence was the world’s most notorious proponent of startlingly unconventional forms of wedded bliss would be a little reticent about issuing orders to the rest of humanity specifying exactly who should be legally entitled to marry whom,” wrote Hendrick Hertzberg in *The New Yorker*. “But no. The Mormon Church . . . does not count reticence among the cardinal virtues. Nor does its own history of matrimonial excess bring a blush to its cheek.”

Along similar lines, *Salt Lake Tribune* columnist Rebecca Walsh wrote that “the victims seem to have turned into the aggressors—and over, of all things, an alternative definition [sic] of marriage.”

“More than 150 years ago, Mormon settlers were driven from their homes and their prophet was killed, in part, because of their polygamous definition of marriage,” she wrote. “Now, Mormons are using the same words that were used against their ancestors.”

OFFICIAL RESPONSES

PERHAPS ANTICIPATING THE outcry that would follow, L. Whitney Clayton of the Presidency of the Seventy held a press conference on 6 November,

two days after the election, asking for “civility and respect.” “We respect the rights of people who have different points of view,” said Clayton. “We hope they’ll respect ours.”

“The Church’s opposition to same-sex marriage neither constitutes nor condones any kind of hostility toward gays and lesbians,” Clayton added. “Even more, the Church does not object to rights for same-sex couples regarding hospitalization and medical care, fair housing and employment rights, or probate rights, so long as these do not infringe on the integrity of the traditional family or of the constitutional rights of churches.”

On 10 November, Equality Utah, a gay rights group, held a press conference in Salt Lake City to announce the drafting of five bills they will introduce to the 2009 Utah State legislature. The bills, which include proposals for statewide domestic partnerships, echo the language used by Elder Clayton.

“Throughout the campaign, while the LDS Church stated its support of [Proposition 8], it also made repeated comments that the Church ‘does not object to rights for same-sex couples regarding hospitalization and medical care, fair housing and employment rights, or probate rights,’” explained Equality Utah chair Stephanie Pappas.

“Just last week, Elder L. Whitney Clayton stated the LDS Church does not oppose ‘civil union or domestic partnerships,’” Pappas added. “We are taking the LDS Church at its word.”

The LDS Church has not yet responded to the invitation to back the bills.

On 7 November, a day after the Los Angeles Temple protests, the LDS Church issued a statement. “It is disturbing that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is being singled out for speaking up as part of its democratic right in a free election,” the statement read. “Members of the

Church in California and millions of others from every faith, ethnicity, and political affiliation who voted for Proposition 8 exercised the most sacrosanct and individual rights in the United States—that of free expression and voting.”

“While those who disagree with our position on Proposition 8 have the right to make their feelings known,” the statement continued, “it is wrong to target the Church and its sacred places of worship for being part of the democratic process.”

On 11 November, the newsroom of LDS.ORG issued statements by two Catholic bishops in solidarity with the Church. “Catholics stand in solidarity with our Mormon brothers and sisters in support of traditional marriage—the union of one man and one woman—that has been the major building block of Western Civilization for millennia,” wrote Bishop William Weigand, head of the Diocese of Sacramento.

“Bigoted attacks on Mormons for the part they played in our coalition are shameful and ignore the reality that Mormon voters were only a small part of the groundswell that supported Proposition 8,” Weigand added. “I personally decry the bigotry recently exhibited towards the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—coming from the opponents of Proposition 8, who ironically, have called those of us supporting traditional marriage intolerant.”

Not all Mormons find the backlash against the Church ironic. “For months, these sacred houses of worship were the precinct offices, members were called to be campaign workers, and ward lists were turned into voter rosters,” Nadine Hansen told the Associated Press. Hansen helped track LDS contributions to the Yes on 8 campaign through her website MormonsFor8.com. “Basically, if the Church wants to know why Mormon sacred places are tar-

geted, look in the mirror,” she added.

GRASSROOTS REPONSES

SEVERAL LATTER-DAY SAINTS who supported Proposition 8 wrote articles and blog entries comparing the protests against LDS temples to the persecution the Church suffered in the 19th century. “We are shocked by all this because, for the most part, this generation of Saints has not lived through this type of persecution,” wrote Los Angeles Police Department veteran Paul Bishop for *Meridian Magazine*.

In an email widely circulated over the Internet, Patricia H. Arnazzi, a Los Angeles Temple worker, paraphrased a speech given by a Sister Martz, an assistant matron in the Temple. As paraphrased by Arnazzi, Martz said that “these past few weeks when mobs have combined and armies have gathered against the Saints, the Lord had protected His house.”

“After Proposition 8 passed, the Temple began receiving threatening calls and mail from those opposing it,” Arnazzi wrote. “They were warned that more than 5,000 people would come to the Temple and burn it to the ground, and stop its work.”

According to Arnazzi’s email, the temple was closed twice—first, on 6 November, during the protest, and then again on 13 November when the temple received an envelope containing white powder. “A brother serving as a recorder that day is a Microbiologist [sic] by profession and used to deal with hazardous substances every day,” Arnazzi wrote. “He was the first to say the white powder in the envelope was only talc, and put every one at ease.”

Gary Lawrence, the California LDS Grassroots Director for Proposition 8, wrote a column for *Meridian Magazine* comparing the battle over same-sex marriage to the war in heaven. “[The] battlefield is now

California, and the parallels between that pre-mortal conflict and the battle over the definition of marriage are striking,” wrote Lawrence. “If the arguments used in the war in heaven were persuasive enough to draw billions of God’s spirit children away from Him, why should we not expect them to be used on the present battlefield? The same minions cast out from the Father’s presence still remember what worked up there.”

Lawrence’s son Matthew, who is gay, responded to his father in a story posted at the website of Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons. Matthew stated he was particularly hurt when “my father said that opponents of Prop. 8 are akin to Lucifer’s followers in the pre-existence.”

“We can all agree to disagree and respect each other’s informed opinions and decisions,” said Matthew, “but don’t put me and Satan in the same sentence please.”

Meridian Magazine columnist Paul Bishop specifically rejected equating gay activists and Satan’s minions. “Those who oppose us in this controversy are not evil. They are the same spirits who stood shoulder to shoulder with us, and with Christ, our elder Brother, during the war in heaven,” Bishop wrote.

“The Adversary and his minions do not now, nor will they ever, possess a mortal body of their own,” Bishop added. “Their demonic spirits may flit around the edges of the mob attempting to exert evil influences, but they are not numbered among those brothers and sisters in Christ whose current petulance springs from emotional pain, frustration, and misunderstanding.”

Bishop’s column asked members not to judge, and reaffirmed that “[the LDS Church] does not hate gays.” Still, Bishop wrote, “the bottom line remains—marriage is to be between a man and a woman. Secular arguments do not trump spiritual imperatives.”