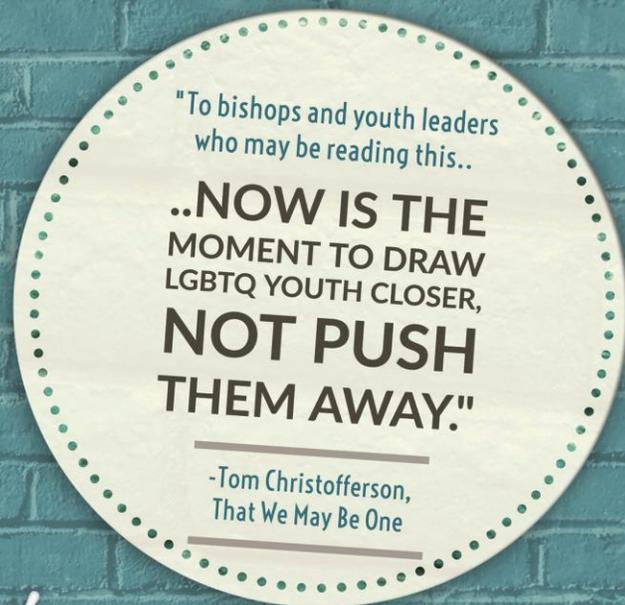




Tom Christofferson

A CANDID RESPONSE TO BISHOPS AND STAKE PRESIDENTS



Tom Christofferson describes himself as “a happy, gay Mormon.” He is the brother of LDS Apostle, Elder D. Todd Christofferson and an active Latter-day Saint. Tom has served as a director on corporate and nonprofit boards and was a founding board member of Encircle, a group providing resources to support LGBTQ individuals and their families in Provo, Utah.

Tom recently released [That We May Be One: A Gay Mormon's Perspective on Faith & Family](#), published by Deseret Book.

Brother Christofferson was asked by Church leadership to offer his counsel and insight to local leaders in an effort to assist them in developing better ways to understand how to serve the LGBTQ members and their families.

This article is offered to you by Tom as a resource for bishops, branch presidents, ward auxiliary leaders, and stake leadership. As a consulting liaison between LDS Church members and the LGBTQ community, Tom offers the following instruction as you navigate topics of sexuality and gender identity in your congregations.

Dear Church Leader

As a church leader, may I ask you to consider and counsel with the entire family as you become aware of LGBTQ youth or individuals in your wards, branches and stakes?

The “coming out” process:

The process of “coming out” is occurring very frequently now as young people are just beginning to enter their teen years. In almost all cases, this awareness comes about even though there has been no inappropriate conduct. These young LGBTQ people have absorbed every statement they've heard over the pulpit, in their classes and in their families, so while they are in no doubt about the position of the church, they are wrestling in their minds and in prayer with how and whether their Heavenly Father still loves them.

Action: You can provide a powerful immediate assurance that there is no sin in being gay or experiencing feelings of same-gender attraction, and help them to feel your love and your faith that they can continue to spiritually mature as active and well-loved members of your ward and stake. Our desire is to ensure that these young people immediately understand that there is a place for them in the church, that their Heavenly Father knows and loves them, and to encourage them to remain active and to minimize the risks of suicide. Their parents are grappling with something, in most cases, with which they have no familiarity, and their world – and perhaps even their faith – is shaken. As these parents reach out to all sources for information and support, I would ask that you make special efforts to be certain they understand your ward and stake continues to love them as well as their child, and that you set the tone in your units for compassion and empathy. Please be aware that these parents will be hyper-aware of insensitive or unkind comments. Please enlist the ward council to help make certain that anything of such a nature said in a class or meeting is quickly countered with statements of love and faith. All parents try to protect their children from harm, so please be extra patient if it seems there is only one topic on their minds for a period of time. These parents will likely be struggling to see with clarity the path of earthly happiness and eternal life for their LGBTQ children, and need your support, your faith, and your encouragement to continue to rely on Him who is mighty to save. Wrap your arms around them and let them know that you want to undertake this journey with them. Love alone will not solve these challenges, but the absence to love will increase the likelihood that entire families, and therefore generations, will move away from the church and gospel.

This is a family experience

Action: Be aware that the siblings of the young men and women you are working with also have special challenges at this time. Some will react with greater protectiveness of their brother or sister and will have questions about what they may perceive as “unfairness” in doctrines or policies. Some may be embarrassed and seek to distance themselves from their family members. Please enlist your Young Men and Young Women leaders in being sensitive to the challenges all members of the family may face.

•Your sensitivity to promptings of the Spirit as you seek to magnify your callings will provide a lifeline at a critical juncture in the lives of each family member. As in all things, the Savior has shown us the way:



“And behold, ye shall meet together oft; and ye shall not forbid any man from coming unto you when ye shall meet together, but suffer them that they may come unto you and forbid them not; But ye shall pray for them, and shall not cast them out; and if it so be that they come unto you oft ye shall pray for them unto the Father, in my name. Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do. Behold ye see that I have prayed unto the Father and ye have all witnessed. And ye see that I have commanded that none of you should go away, but rather have commanded that ye should come unto me, that ye might feel and see; even so shall ye do unto the world...” (3 Nephi 18:22-25)