

Update

Mormons and ERA in the Media

In an article for the Knight-Ridder newspapers, Vera Glaser claims that the Mormon Church is facing a "historic rift" over the Equal Rights Amendment and freedom of speech. The article which was carried in early January was not published by any Utah newspapers.

According to the article, "Interviews with dozens of excommunicants, members attempting to withdraw and members in good standing reveal that the church, through its lay clergy in the wards, or neighborhood churches, had been quietly excommunicating ERA advocates for months before the Johnson case drew national attention." A perusal of the 5000 letters, telegrams, and financial contributions sent to Sonia Johnson turned up about 200 with enclosed copies of letters to President Kimball requesting excommunication or withdrawal, according to Glaser. Mrs. Johnson also reported a flood of requests for membership in Mormons for ERA, which now has about 1000 members and, according to Mrs. Johnson, many "closet" supporters.

The article quoted a number of other people, both in and out of the Church, about their reactions to the present controversy. Some examples of these comments follow.

A 47-year-old educator: "I paid my tithes. I never made a secret of my support for ERA. I was removed from the Church positions in which I worked with young women. I refused to come before the Bishop's court. They excommunicated me anyway."

Marilee Latta, President of the Utah Equal Rights Coalition and a Mormon in good standing: "Anyone who says there are not pressures on ERA supporters is not speaking the truth. . . . The pressures are tremendous. . . . ERA supporters are ostracized by other ward members. They are badgered by employers who happen to be Mormon." Despite the atmosphere of fear, according to Latta, organizations in her coalition, without exception, have experienced a surge of new members and financial support since the Johnson excommunication.

A faculty wife at BYU and supporter of

the ERA who refused to be interviewed: "It would cost my husband his job."

A Mormon member of the media: "We have to read out-of-state clippings. . . . The Deseret News and Provo papers published only anti-Sonia letters."

Joyce Slechta, an ERA supporter in Mission Viejo, California: "A year ago I became co-founder of the women's center in San Juan Capistrano. I conducted rap sessions. I was called to the Bishop's office and asked about my connection with the center and was I associating with lesbians. I am married, have five children, and will be a grandmother in March, so my choice of lifestyle is clear. I was totally intimidated and frightened. I believe in Mormonism. I don't want to be excommunicated. . . . I could belong to Mormons for ERA, but if I did anything too actively to promote it I would be reprimanded. At the same time they kept saying you can freely do what you want."

Dr. Reba Keele at BYU: "I have seen women in this valley with PhDs who have been deans, who have suffered discrimination because they are women and have been fighting for women's rights all their lives. I have seen them go absolutely schizophrenic when the prophet's statement came out and suddenly become the fiercest fighters against ERA."

J.D. Williams, professor of political science at the University of Utah: He sees the Church in "increasing jeopardy" of losing its tax-exempt status because, in his view, it is violating the separation of church and state as mandated in the U.S. Constitution. "One of the toughest things for me as a Mormon is to see the regularity with which they (church authorities) are involved in politics. . . . They are almost always on the wrong side. They just fall on their face in politics." The Johnson trial was a "source of enormous heartbreak" to him. "I don't believe in heresy trials. I have a feeling that when organizations become afraid of criticism, they are in real difficulty. . . . When the Church gets involved in the

unrestrained way it has engaging in subterranean techniques, channeling contributions through a front organization to defeat the ERA, they are acting more and more like a political body."

Anti-LDS Clause in Idaho Constitution

The Idaho House of Representatives has unanimously endorsed a proposed constitutional amendment that would eliminate language intended to discriminate against Mormons.

The constitution, drafted in the last century, prohibits persons "living in what is known as patriarchal, plural, or celestial marriage" from voting or holding civil office. The language has long been ignored. The state's governor and many members of the legislature are Mormons.

The constitutional amendment now goes to the Senate for consideration. If both houses approve the proposal by a two-thirds vote, it will be placed on the next general election ballot.

Past efforts to delete the section have been unsuccessful.

Latter-day Saints and Cancer

A University of California researcher has confirmed that Mormons contract cancer less often than other Americans.

Dr. James E. Enstrom, cancer epidemiology researcher for the School of Public Health at UCLA, published the results of a recent study in an American Cancer Society journal.

His study was specifically with groups that have previously been identified as low-risk for cancer. Members of the LDS and Seventh-Day Adventist churches were included in the study. Both churches promote abstinence from cigarette smoking and support comparatively healthy lifestyles.

Mormons in Utah have a cancer death rate about 75 percent of the American total, his study showed. Statistics derived from 360,000 LDS people in California from 1968 to 1975 show a cancer mortality ratio of 66 percent for males and 81 percent for females.

The most striking findings of his study, Enstrom said, were among the males who hold the offices of High Priest and Seventy. These men, likely to be among the most active in the Church, have a mortality rate only 50 percent of the U.S. average.

In this group, the life expectancy is eight years longer than among peers in the United States at large, Enstrom's study reported. (*Deseret News*, 25 January, 1980.)