

SINGLE ADULT WARDS STRETCH CHURCH POLICY

IN THE spring of 1986 the Church issued a new set of guidelines to standardize student and single adult wards throughout Church. However, today U.S. landscape of single wards is at least as varied and chaotic as a result of the policy as it was before.

Singles comprise a significant portion of the adult LDS membership. In the Church's 1981 membership survey of the United States and Canada, singles without children comprised 27 percent of the households in the Church and another 5 percent were singles with children (a total of 32 percent).

The stated overall purpose of single adult wards was to temporarily meet the needs of "younger unmarried members" who have completed missions and have graduated from college or are approaching graduation, to provide Church leadership experiences and to "create an environment in which single adults can meet and marry."

In general, the 1986 policy permitted stake presidencies to organize a single adult ward if there were more than 200 single members in their stake between the ages of 21 and 30 (a limit few stakes could meet); when the number dropped below 200 the ward was to be discontinued. Singles under the 21 who were not living with their parents were permitted to attend a singles ward. Singles residing in stakes without a singles ward were not allowed to become members of a singles ward in a nearby stake. Single parents with children at home were to attend conventional wards with complete youth programs.

The policy appears to have been a compromise on the general

Church level between authorities who favored single adult wards and those opposed. The setting of the lower age limit at 21 instead of 18 was partially in response to complaints from parents along Utah's Wasatch Front who did not want their children just out of high school and still living at home to attend another ward.

The upper age limit addressed the concern of some authorities that older single men were dating and marrying young single women and hence increasing the already disproportionate number of older single women in the Church. It also met the concerns of those who feel that the Church should not have permanent specialty wards for any group. In addition, there were complaints from older singles, particularly in Utah, who felt that being assigned to a singles ward cut them off from family and friends and was the equivalent of being a "second-class" member in the Church.

Since 1973 when the First Presidency allowed the creation of single adult wards, their existence has been controversial and unconstant, with wards being created, dissolved and recreated again. The current policy has continued the tradition. When the Guide was released, some stakes below the 200-member threshold dissolved their singles wards, others kept their ward and only enforced the 21-year age requirement, others also sent the membership records of everyone 31 and older to their "conventional" wards. Some, especially in urban areas outside Utah, just ignored the policy altogether. This varied compliance resulted in confusion, resentment, and a sizeable active but wardless single pop-

ulation.

A brief survey of some of the single adult wards in the U.S. metropolitan areas illustrates the problems. Salt Lake City may have the greatest concentration of singles and single adult wards. In the early 1980s all non-students were required to leave the University of Utah student wards and attend the conventional or single adult wards in their stake. In reality, many singles, not comfortable in their conventional ward and not having a single ward in their stake, never settled in another ward. "Ward hopping" in search of friends and community is common occurrence, as is regularly attending a single adult ward without officially being a member of it. Today, there are hundreds of singles who have not had a calling in years.

The number of single adult wards in the Salt Lake valley is decreasing as stakes discontinue their single adult wards to meet the 1986 policy. Those that remain enforce the policy in different ways. Some wards only accept members living within the stake boundaries, others openly invite any single to attend but will only extend callings to members living within their boundaries, while still others seemingly accept the entire valley as their jurisdiction. Some wards have the reputation of being "meat markets"—primarily social centers, places to meet and date other singles. Other wards have a tighter-knit sense of community (particularly due to boundary maintenance).

Understandably, regular Church programs, such as home and visiting teaching, suffer greatly when an "active" elder can go for years without having a calling, home teachers or a home teaching assignment, or a bishop who knows his name. While most active singles regularly attend one ward, many singles report that the Salt Lake singles wards focus more on social activities and less on the service and reactivation.

In contrast, the five wards in the Washington, D.C., area have instituted several innovation which

address many of the problems manifest in Salt Lake. The three wards in the Virginia suburbs have replaced the standard home evening group program with "priesthood correlation groups" which plan weekly projects to instruct about and implement the three mission of the Church: proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the Saints (including all aspects of welfare services); and redeeming the dead. In addition, the wards and groups get involved in numerous community service projects. Reportedly, this focus helps give these wards a sense of purpose beyond being a "graduate MIA."

On the other side of the Potomac, the Washington Stake discontinued its single adult ward and replaced it with two hybrid conventional wards whose membership includes all single adults in the stake plus married couples without children at home who live within the ward boundaries (couples with children attend other conventional wards with youth programs). Members in the ward feel the arrangement has proved successful both in meeting the need of single adults to affiliate with older members and in revitalizing wards in aging residential neighborhoods.

Several common elements help make both Washington innovations work. One is the strict maintenance of ward boundaries which include not just the sponsoring stake but other stakes in the regions, thus providing an ordered way for singles in stakes without a singles ward to join one. Having a stable membership allows ward leaders to use the conventional ward programs to better watch over their members, administer Church programs, and provide callings for all everyone.

Within the stakes, there is very little sense that these wards are simply temporary places where singles find their eternal mate. Indeed, long-time members say they appreciate being treated as a legitimate ward, instead as a stepchild of the Church. The stakes expect the same from their single adult wards as they do any other

ward, including budget assignments, staffing stake positions, welfare assignments, road shows, etc.

In most of the Washington wards, there is no upper age limit at which members are required to leave the ward (although some will not accept new members past 35). The local experience is that as singles approach forty without marrying, many of them decide on their own to transfer their membership to the conventional ward. Several bishops feel that this is preferable to arbitrarily forcing someone to move at a specific age, thereby creating unnecessary resentment.

In contrast, many singles in Manhattan, where there is no single adult ward, say that they feel comfortable in the diverse membership of the downtown wards. They receive important callings, and do not want a single adult ward organized.

On the other side of the continent, the San Francisco single adult ward is addressing the growing challenge of gays in the Church. A large portion of its members are believing Mormons who openly acknowledge homosexual inclinations but who, because of their faith, are celibate. The bishop meets regularly with groups of gays for counseling and support. Many prominent ward positions are staffed by celibate gay ward members. Given President Hinckley's comments at a recent General Priesthood Meeting that the Church does not recommend marriage as a solution to homosexuality, many of them could be active single adults for their entire life.

Down the coast, the dozen-plus Los Angeles single adult wards are

in a balkanized situation similar to that in Salt Lake. There are wards with strict membership rules and boundaries while others, responding to the wardless single population "looking for a home," welcome all who attend. There are also stakes without single wards which adamantly refuse to allow their members to transfer to wards outside the stake.

While there are diverse single adult programs throughout the United States, there is one thing single adult ward bishops are nearly unanimous about—the importance of singles wards. They do not feel that a conventional ward supplemented by stake and regional activities can adequately meet the needs of most single Church members. Citing numerous examples of individual growth, opportunities for major callings, and increased social support, nearly every singles bishop argues that the needs of singles were better addressed in his ward than in a conventional ward where the emphasis is on the youth programs and adults primarily receive support from spouses.

Clearly, as local leaders respond to local needs, the Church's single adult ward policy has not brought uniformity to Church administration. In some cases it has had the unintended result of alienating single members who find little in common with their conventional ward but are restricted from joining a single adult ward. In many ways, the confusion over singles policy is a metaphor for the confusion in the Church over how to assimilate our increasing differences under the umbrella of unity.

bargain through which authorities hoped to learn all the details of Hofmann's extraordinarily complex case, it took only 27 minutes for board members to reach their decision. According to Board Chair Victoria Palacios, the decision was justified by the "large number of [Hofmann's] victims" and his "callous disregard for human life."

The decision seemed not to disturb Hofmann, who testified before the three-person board for about an hour. Whatever Hofmann's feelings may have been, for most other members of the community the board's decision came as both a surprise and a distinct relief. It marked a decisive end to the chain of events that began on 15 October 1985, when Hofmann murdered Steven F. Christensen and Kathleen Sheets.

As investigators began to grasp the scope and complexity of the Hofmann case, they recognized that it could take years to build a firm case against Hofmann. In fact, in an interview with the *Deseret News*, Salt Lake County Attorney Robert L. Stott estimated prosecutors would have had only a 75 percent chance of convicting Hofmann for the murder of Christensen and only 25 percent for the murder of Sheets.

Eventually, prosecutors reached an agreement with Hofmann in which he pleaded guilty on 23 January 1987 to two counts of second-degree murder (which is not a capital offense) and two counts of fraud. In return for these relatively lenient charges, Hofmann agreed to discuss the details of the two murders, as well as 33 documents he forged and sold, in a series of interviews with county prosecutors.

When the transcripts of the interviews were made public last July, they proved disappointing. Hofmann and the county prosecutors spent only 14 pages discussing the murders. The rest of the 537 page transcripts were taken up by discussions of the technical details of the forgeries.

Polls taken after the release of the transcripts showed that an overwhelming majority of Utahns

felt that Hofmann had duped the prosecutors by offering full disclosure on the forgeries and then balking when the time came to discuss the murders. However, the transcript concludes with a threat by the prosecutors to report his noncompliance to the parole board.

On 29 January, the prosecutors delivered on that threat. In a letter to the parole board, Stott noted that "Two respected citizens of this state were murdered by Hofmann. . . . The victims of Hofmann's crimes are numerous, the damages are staggering. Hofmann has yet to make a full and complete answering of all his crimes."

Stott noted specifically that Hofmann had refused to discuss the details of ten charges, including the murders; that he had shown a general reluctance to discuss his motives and feelings regarding his crimes; and that prosecutors doubted his claim that the explosion in which Hofmann was injured was meant as a suicide attempt, although they could not disprove it.

Hofmann's attorney Bradley Rich expressed surprise at the parole board's decision. "Historically the board has looked at some very serious homicides and set reviews at 10, 15, and 20 years down the road." Rich expressed his continued support for his client and added, "I look forward to the time when a future board will say he deserves another chance."

Although Hofmann's career has come to a conclusive end, it may be years before the dealers and collectors who bought his forgeries (many of which are still undetected) and the historians who interpreted them deal with the damage he did to them. For others—Hofmann's family, his associates, and the family and friends of Steve Christensen and Kathy Sheets—the task may never be complete.

HOFMANN PAROLE DENIED

By Ron Bitton

ON JANUARY 29, the Utah Board of Pardons decided not to grant a parole or rehearing date for Mark Hofmann. The decision by the board virtually guarantees that

Hofmann will spend the rest of his life behind bars.

Although the board had suggested earlier that Hofmann serve only seven years as part of a plea

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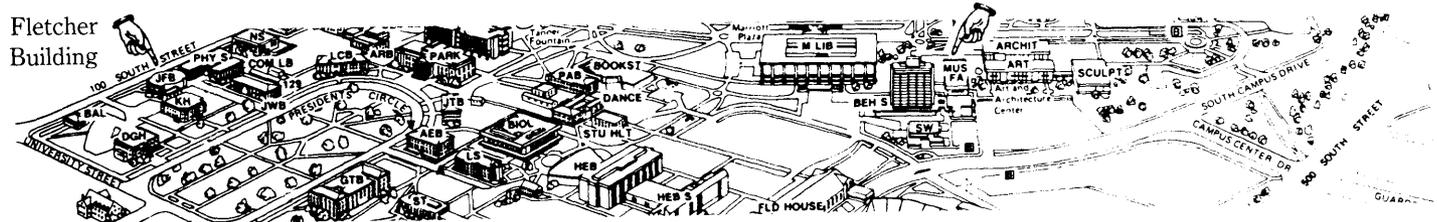
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BURDENS OF BIRTH

MUCH TO the consternation of some young women who feel that the LDS Church's veneration of motherhood is not matched by its actions, the Mormon church does not provide paid maternity leave for female employees, but treats pregnancy as the equivalent of an illness. The Church does, however, allow six weeks of leave without pay while still holding the position for the employee (if sick leave time is accumulated it may be used instead). Women's rights activists say the policy is about average for Utah; only two percent of U.S. companies provide paid maternity leave.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

Reflecting the continuing official concern about immorality at Church schools, Ricks College recently announced that all hot tubs installed in college-approved off-campus housing must be segregated by sex, monitored, and secluded for privacy. The school, which recently banned cable TV from student housing, has not had a history of problems since only one complex, the all male Alpine Chalet, currently has a tub. No mention was made of swimming pools.

HIDDEN TITLE

FORMER BYU religion students who spent late nights sifting through the Book of Mormon to find those priceless pearls to fill in the thousands of blanks in Cleon Skousen's *Hidden Treasures From the Book of Mormon* will be happy to learn that the treasures are no longer hidden. Apparently in a response to all the discussion about Joseph Smith, magic, and treasure seeking, the word "hidden" has been deleted from the title of the latest edition.

THE WORLD IS HIS CAMPUS

THE CONTROVERSIAL D. Michael Quinn, author of *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years*, "LDS Church Authority and New Plural Marriages, 1890-1904," and *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* recently announced that when winter semester ends this April he will resign from his "continuing status" (tenured) position as professor of history at Brigham Young University because he wants to "pursue his career plans elsewhere." For the immediate future, Quinn has secured a grant to allow him to do full-time research at the Huntington Library on two book-length projects he has been working on since his dissertation: a study of the kinship affiliations of the LDS hierarchy, and a social and institutional history of polygamy from 1830 to the present.

SUBLIMINAL PROSELYTING?

"Mormons are not up front about how they do things," complained Moshe Dan to the *Jerusalem Post*, objecting to the way lights in BYU's recently completed Jerusalem Center form a giant crucifix at night. Dan and other Old City members of The Committee to Preserve the Holiness of Old Jerusalem have requested that the Knesset discuss BYU's apparent proselyting, which the university agreed to forego as a precondition to building the complex on the Mount of Olives. Explaining that Mormons don't use the symbol of the cross, Kelly Ogden, the center's assistant director, said the cross was a coincidental byproduct of interior hallway lights. He promised that if the now turned-on grounds' lights don't do the trick the school will turn on more lights inside to change the pattern.

