

SUNSTONE

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The mission of The Sunstone Education Foundation is to sponsor open forums of Mormon thought and experience. Under the motto, "Faith Seeking Understanding," we examine and express the rich spiritual, intellectual, social, and artistic qualities of Mormon history and contemporary life. We encourage humanitarian service, honest inquiry, and responsible interchange of ideas that is respectful of all people and what they hold sacred.

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YEA, YEA  NAY, NAY

PLEASE FORGIVE . . .

Due to a printing error, several pictures and images in the previous issue (SUNSTONE, December 2003) were marred with smeared ink or otherwise appeared darker than normal. Of the items most affected by the error, the image of Natalie Palmer Sheppard (page 77) has made everyone involved in the printing and shipping process feel the worst. Our sincere apologies to our readers, and especially to Natalie and the other authors whose work may not have looked as nice as it should have.



OUR OWN CHURCH PLACE

SINCE READING YOUR LAST ISSUE (SUNSTONE, December 2003), I've been thinking about Rebecca Chandler's childhood feeling of having a place in the Mormon church. And I've thought about Lynne Whitesides' wanting the Church to feel like home but sensing the absence of the female in it.

I remember how the "absent female" almost estranged my brother. Because he wasn't then married, he was told he wouldn't be called to the elders quorum presidency after all. Maybe the Church has certain places only for certain people and lets those who don't fit fall through cracks.

Singles are shoved out of singles wards on that crucial 40th birthday. Financial correlation clipped organization leaders of control over their own funding and spending.

Some such cracks may be what Armand Mauss meant by the "unintended consequences" (SUNSTONE July 2003) of efforts to create communities around commonalities such as single, ethnic, and retiree wards.

More and more, we lock-step through the block system, followed by choir practice. "Brothers and sisters, please clear the chapel because we have only twenty minutes to sing before the other ward comes in." *No wonder we wonder where the Sunday vibes went.* Are we being told that our place is to fit into the Church as presently constituted or forget it?

Maybe, as Emily Dickinson writes, we have to make our own church place. And we must do it daily, not just on the seventh.

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church--
I keep it staying at Home--
With a Boblink for a Chorister--
And an Orchard, for a dome.
Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice--

I just wear my Wings--
And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
Our little Sexton sings.
God preaches, a noted Clergyman--
And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven, at last
I'm going all along.

GALE STRINGHAM
Los Angeles, California

KINSHIP

YOUNG JARED CHRISTENSEN IS TO be commended for his courage in sharing his current doubts and hopes for future resolutions and faith ("My Great Dilemma," SUNSTONE, December 2003). While most of his questions are not ones on my doubt-faith border, I feel a kinship for him, as I suspect many others also do.

His desire to "prove contraries" in the service of finding truths will be rewarded in quiet ways, with no fanfare or acclaim. But the contents of his faith will be earned rather than just asserted without having been extensively tested. His stance and determination are a tribute to his parents, both his lovely mother, still living, and his remarkable father, tragically killed by a selfish egomaniac.

RICHARD WRIGHT
Phoenix, Arizona

BLOOMING DIVERSITY

CONCERNING STEVEN FALES'S ONE-man play, "Confessions of a Mormon Boy" (SUNSTONE, December 2003): 'Preciate ya, but on page 43, it should be "Bette" Davis and on page 44, it should probably be the theatrical "trouper" instead of the highway "trooper."

Still, who can wait to get to heaven to meet our fabulous "mother of all creation?"

This glorified resurrected diva has celestial tea parties and sneaks cigarettes. She lacks her own Internet address but has learned Heavenly Father's password and sends inspiration to her children whenever the heck she likes. But she has to wear a veil.

Say, except for the cigarette and password part, have mortal Molly Mormons been pretty much gender-rolled into living likewise? Remember Luke gave Martha a bad rap for trying to be domestic. Well, even worse, Martha Stewart now faces jail time. But Fales's play repeatedly reminds us that the purpose of mortality is to suffer.

Nevertheless, rejoice in the spring that has brought not only the daffodils that Fales favors, but crocus, hyacinths, and tulips plus bushes and trees laden with glorious blossoms of many colors. Maybe the diversity can take our minds off stereotypes and the confinement they cause.

JAN OLDS
Denver, Colorado

TESTIFYING BY PRESENCE

THE PERSPECTIVES IN THE "WHY WE Stay" essays (SUNSTONE, October 2003) illustrate very well how common sense, com-

munity, faith, and hope can trump obstacles.

From Toby Pingree: "I am buoyed up whenever I gather with the saints, be it in a high priests group meeting in the Andes, a testimony meeting in my home ward, or an open discussion group like Sunstone where I learn from others and my voice is respectfully heard."

From Mary Anne Hunter: "I remain active in the Church in spite of its flaws because it is unthinkable to do otherwise. Full participation makes me happy. I enjoy going to Church and to the temple. And as I try to live according to principles of the gospel and exercise faith, I experience peace and joy."

From Bill Bradshaw: "I now find myself in the very paradoxical state of being less sure about a whole lot of things but having greater faith. I used to view the statement, 'Have faith in Christ,' as. . . You'd better have faith or else. Now I see it as a simpler description of the way things are, the way this life works."

From Grethe Peterson: "My life experiences have taught me the beauty and value of diversity. We may not look or think alike, but we are all God's children. We are all equal before our Lord, so our ability to reach out to one another brings us closer to heaven."

From Tom Rogers: "The restored gospel's explanation of life and human destiny satisfies my contemplative mind. It appeals to me much like Joseph described certain truths as 'tasting good.'"

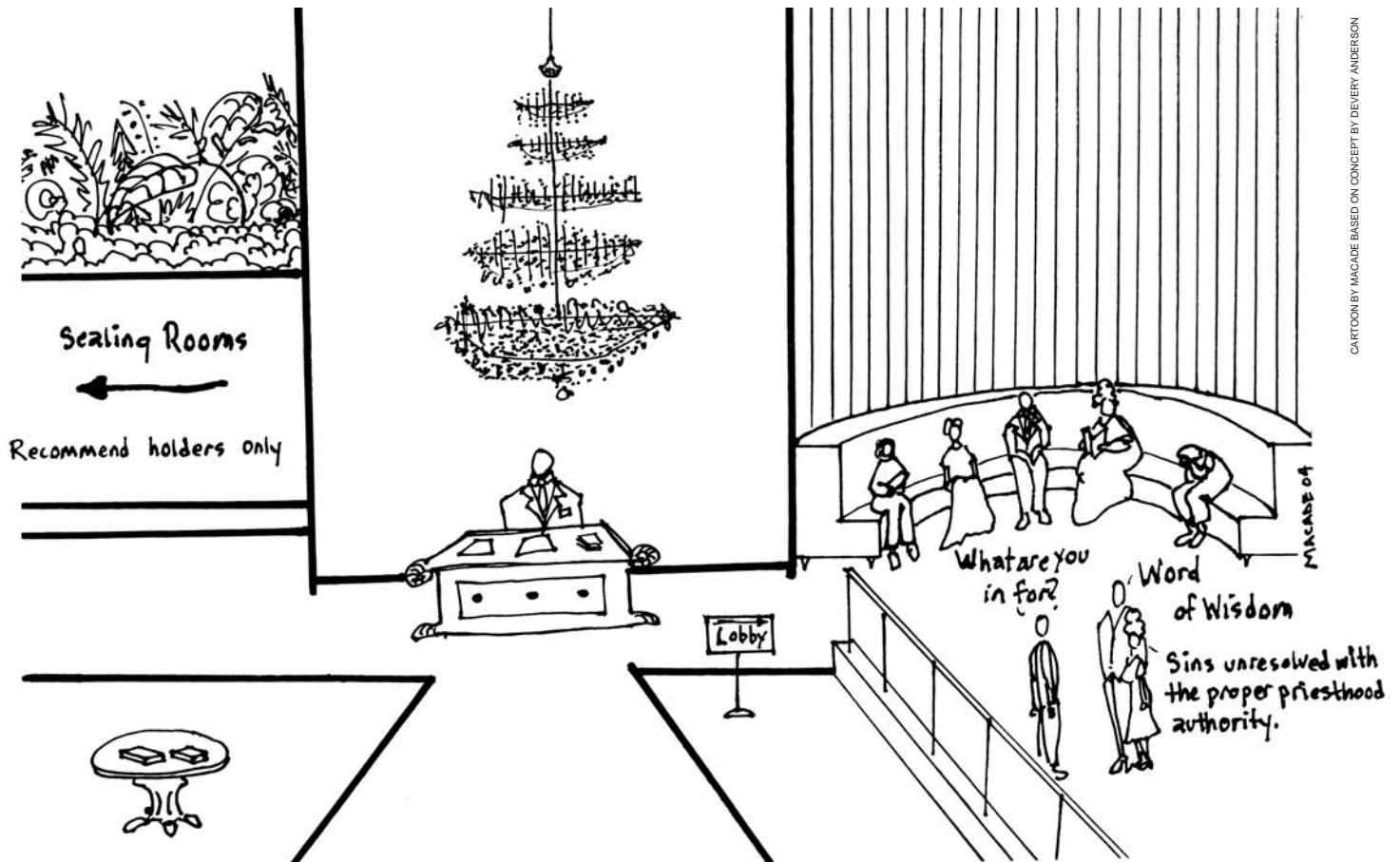
Recently my spouse said, "I must find another Sunday School class. Brother 'Bland' puts me to sleep. I try to come open to learn and help others have a spiritual experience, but I'd be better off at home reading the Book of Mormon on my own."

"I know. His voice is soft, and I lose track, too. You notice I'm often reading the scriptures on my lap or—dozing," I said.

But we keep coming. We're supposed to be in church at that hour, and when we are, our presence, our willing countenance, may encourage someone else. We come seeking to learn, worship, renew covenants, receive guidance, comfort, and inspiration to live and serve better. And if we pay attention during the three-hour block, we at least renew our covenants and reflect on Christ's gift. We may also learn of the newest birth or mission call in the ward. Both testify of God's continuing faith and hope in us.

Keep SUNSTONE coming.

LEIGH WALKER
Seattle, Washington



CARTOON BY MACADE BASED ON CONCEPT BY DEVERY ANDERSON