

## UPDATE

## HEY, DUDE, I'M A MORMON

A PROFESSIONAL SURFER HAPPILY GUIDES HER board over Pacific waves. A couple handles important affairs at the Washington D.C.-based companies they work for. A young man describes his love for professional skateboarding and tries fancy tricks on his board.

These are three of the slick, urban, fast-paced stories included in the “I’m a Mormon” ads that the LDS Church aired beginning last August in nine American markets, including the Twin Cities, Baton Rouge, Rochester, and Tucson.

The campaign resembles the “Meet a Scientologist” campaign launched on YouTube in August 2009, which likewise shows young, successful, urban folks sharing fast-paced testimonials about a happy and fulfilling life.

But while the Scientologists’ ads begin by presenting their subjects as Scientologists, explaining directly how Scientology leads to a happier life, the new Mormon campaign is subtler. Not until the punch line—“and I’m a Mormon”—do we discover exactly what has made these individuals so self-confident and content.

Despite a preponderance of white, middle-class professionals, one ad tells the story of Valentin, a young Mexican-American who lives in a barrio and works in lawn maintenance. “There’s happiness in my future now,” says Valentin, whose conversion coincided with his recovery from alcoholism. “My name is Valentin, I’m sober now, and I’m Mormon.”

BYU professor of journalism Joel Campbell told reporter Liz Goodwin that the ads respond to a decline in Mormonism’s public image in recent years. “The Church’s desire here is just to tell people who have no opinion or a negative opinion of Mormons to say, ‘Look, we’re not a

bunch of polygamists who wear weird clothes and have a compound in Texas. That’s not us, we’re just regular folks,’” Campbell said.

Historian Jan Shipps believes that the new campaign attempts to correct the perception of Mormons as impossibly “squeaky-clean.” “For a long time, their image was perfect, that they had all of the Boy Scout virtues and none of the American vices,” Shipps told the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. “I think maybe there’s been a conscious decision that the goody-goody image was too goody-goody.”

Unlike a number of previous Church media campaigns, the new “I’m a Mormon” campaign does not promote the Book of Mormon, faith in Christ, nor even the promise of a happy family. Rather the ads project a more generic image of contented living. The campaign’s de-emphasis on Mormon distinctiveness has made it easy for critics of the Church to appropriate the style—critics such as Robert (no last name given), who posted his own video narrative on YouTube in reaction to the Church campaign.

A Canadian who served a mission in Japan, Robert explains that he lives a happy life: footage shows him wakeboarding, playing chess, and rollerblading with his girlfriend. As the video progresses, Robert explains, “I was always told when I was thinking of leaving [the LDS faith], ‘Oh, you’ll be unhappy, you’ll be miserable.’ It’s not true. I’ve never been happier.”

“My name is Robert,” he concludes, “And I’m an ex-Mormon.”

To see the new “I’m a Mormon” campaign, visit <http://www.youtube.com/mormon>. For Robert’s response, follow the link at <http://latterdaymainstreet.com/?p=2780>.



## LDS CHURCH ISSUES STATEMENT ABOUT IMMIGRATION

ON 11 NOVEMBER, AS SOME UTAH LEGISLATORS prepared to follow Arizona's lead in enacting tough immigration laws, the LDS Church issued a statement that, while acknowledging "that every nation has the right to enforce its laws and secure its borders," also proclaims love for one's neighbors and laments the breakup of undocumented families.

The cautious wording of the statement was accompanied by explicit Church support for the Utah Compact, which asks for "a humane approach" to the realities of immigration in Utah. The Utah Compact is supported by a range of religious, political, and civic leaders, including Catholic Bishop John C. Wester, Episcopal Bishop Scott Hayashi, Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff, and *Deseret News* CEO Mark Willes.

The Utah Compact is widely viewed as a reaction to Utah state representative Stephen Sandstrom (R-Orem), who has decried "the influx of illegals" and proposes tough enforcement laws to control illegal immigration in Utah. Last year, Sandstrom, who is LDS, praised the role of Senator Russell Pearce, also LDS, for sponsoring Arizona's SB1070, one of the broadest and strictest anti-immigration laws in the country (SUNSTONE, June 2010: 71–72).

Even though LDS Church support of the Utah Compact effectively kills the chance that Utah's legislature will pass a law like Arizona's SB1070, Sandstrom told the *Salt Lake Tribune* that he will press ahead with his bill. "I think this is going to open up a huge division," Sandstrom said, adding that he has already been "bombarded with emails" from people "telling me to not back down."

Tony Yapias, a Mormon and the director of Proyecto Latino de Utah, said the Church's statement is "an answer to our prayers" and what he has been waiting for.

### NEW CHURCH HANDBOOK OF INSTRUCTIONS LEAKED BEFORE OFFICIAL RELEASE

THE 2010 CHURCH HANDBOOK OF INSTRUCTIONS, which establishes guidelines on how to lead LDS congregations, handle Church affairs, and administer ecclesiastical discipline, was posted in its entirety on the web three days before its official release. The person who posted it, going by the pseudonym of Martin Luther, wrote a long essay decrying LDS correlation and the Church's hierarchical structure, calling the book "a 403-page monstrosity." "We do not need another handbook or manual," the blogger concluded. "What we need in the Church is the Spirit."

The posting caused a sensation among LDS bloggers. Even though Martin Luther's site was shut down three days after its launch, on that same day an improved scan of the handbook, with a search function, began to circulate.

The Church maintains that the contents of the handbook are confidential. "This handbook has been prepared solely for use by general and local Church officers to administer the affairs of the Church," the new handbook warns. "It should not be duplicated or given to any other persons."

Members such as LDS lawyer Nadine Hansen feel that such a proscription is unfair. Says Hansen: "The handbook contains the rules for Church members, the violation of which can lead to Church discipline, but the manual is kept from them. A parallel would be if the laws of the state were kept secret, but you could still be prosecuted for violating the laws. It's ridiculous—not to mention that it is laughable for Church leaders to think they can keep anything secret in the age of the Internet."

Previous editions of the handbook have circulated online since the early days of the Internet—despite legal efforts by the Church to control access to the document. In 1990, the Church pursued a lawsuit against Jerald and Sandra Tanner over the handbook, going so far as to demand that the Tanners remove from their website a link to an Australian site where the handbook had also been posted. The case received national media attention because of its ramifications for freedom of speech on the Internet (SUNSTONE, December 2002: 42–44).

### RICHARD VAN WAGONER DIES

SUNSTONE FRIEND AND CONTRIBUTOR RICHARD Van Wagoner died unexpectedly 10 October at age 64. A clinical audiologist by profession, Richard will be remembered as an insightful and prolific writer on Mormon history. The co-author of *A Book of Mormons*, Richard also authored *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, *Lehi: Portraits of a Utah Town*, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess*, and *Pioneering*



Richard Van Wagoner

*Lehi City: A 150-year Pictorial History.*

“Richard was a great friend and colleague,” reads an announcement posted on the website of Signature Books. “We admired him as a trailblazer in Mormon studies. His award-winning *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess*, will remain the definitive study of Rigdon for years to come. A member of our editorial board, Richard was an engaging, caring, inquisitive, beautiful individual. We will miss him dearly.”

Lavina Fielding Anderson, also on the editorial board of Signature Books, wrote that “Richard was both a rare historian and a rare human being. His scholarly output over the years, starting with *A Book of Mormons*, co-authored with Steven Walker, is a classic work. Richard broke new ground with his one-volume history of polygamy and his biography of Sidney Rigdon. I’m reading his five-volume compilation of *The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* and learning an amazing amount of information about

Brigham. I edited an early draft of his biography of Joseph Smith in New York. I thought there wasn’t much new that could be said about that period and was amazed at what Richard found.”

Scott Kenney, co-founder of Signature Books, wrote that “Richard will be sorely missed, not only by the Mormon history community, but by the residents of Lehi he served and family members who relied on him to nurture and effectively help raise grandchildren. I will always remember the last time he visited—to loan me his Sidney Rigdon papers. While we chatted, an eight-year-old grandson who lived with him called to see when he was coming home. Richard was so gentle and reassuring. I don’t remember the first time I met Richard, but he was an enthusiastic member of Signature’s first board of directors. It was a joy to be with him. For more than thirty years he was a generous, supportive friend and colleague. His passing saddens me thoroughly.”

People

**At Large.** TWO ANONYMOUS PARACHUTERS who BASE jumped from the top of the Church Office Building on 12 November. According to Church employee Annie Beer, the two men landed in a parking lot across the street. By the time police arrived at the scene, the jumpers had sped off in a silver SUV. “It must have been on their bucket list or something,” Beer told the *Deseret News*.

**Died.** Former Relief Society President BARBARA BRADSHAW SMITH, 88, of pulmonary fibrosis. Smith led the Church women’s organization between 1974 and 1984—a period marked by national debate about the Equal Rights Amendment. Appointed by President SPENCER W. KIMBALL, Smith took an active role in fighting the ERA, championing traditional gender roles across the nation, and debating pro-ERA campaigner SONIA JOHNSON on the *Phil Donahue Show*. Smith also played an active role in the controversial International Women’s Year Conference, held in 1977 in Salt Lake City (see pages 50 and 52).



**Published.** The biography of LDS President THOMAS S. MONSON, 83, by Deseret Book. Titled *To the Rescue: The Biography of Thomas S. Monson*, the volume chronicles President Monson’s rise from boy to prophet and includes many little-known pictures. For the project, President Monson handpicked HEIDI S. SWINTON, an author and screenwriter who is the stepdaughter of LDS historian LEONARD ARRINGTON.

**Died.** LDS artist ARNOLD FRIBERG, 96, of complications related to a hip injury. The conceptual artist for CECIL B.

DeMILLE’s 1956 film *The Ten Commandments*, Friberg will be remembered for his 1975 painting *Prayer at Valley Forge*, for his bodybuilder-like representations of Book of Mormon heroes, and for his dramatic, richly colored Book of Mormon scenes, which the LDS Church reproduced by the millions. Fiercely independent, Friberg had an uneasy relationship with the Church. LDS leaders disapproved of his 1963 painting *Christ Appearing to the Nephites* (later renamed *The Risen Lord*), which showed Jesus’s bare left breast. In the 1960s, the LDS Church hired illustrator HARRY ANDERSON instead of Friberg to create some of its most iconic representations of Jesus. Despite the rare honor of being memorialized with a funeral at Temple Square’s Assembly Hall, Friberg chose to be buried in a Royal Canadian Mounted Police uniform instead of in temple clothes. Clifton Holt Jolley’s tribute to Friberg appears in SUNSTONE issue 160 (September 2010: 81–83).



**Died.** Excommunicated LDS leader GEORGE P. LEE, 67, the first and only Native American thus far to become a General Authority. A gifted student and teacher, Lee was called to the First Quorum of the Seventy in 1975, at age 32. In the mid-1980s, after SPENCER W. KIMBALL’s death, Lee clashed with other LDS leaders over the termination of several Church programs for Native Americans. Lee accused LDS leaders of “turning your backs on the Lamanites, the very people on whom your salvation hangs.” LDS sociologist Armand Mauss has called Lee “one of the truly tragic figures in modern Mormon history.”

