

## UPDATE

### *GENERAL CONFERENCE BRINGS NEW POLICIES, WARNING*

THE OCTOBER 2002 General Conference featured several announcements of interest dealing with temple recommends and the missionary program, stern warnings concerning the growing problem of child abuse, and differing interpretations following an apostle's remarks on peace.

Citing the workload often heaped upon presiding branch, ward, and stake leaders, President Gordon B. Hinckley, during the Saturday priesthood session, announced that temple recommends will now be valid for two years from the issue date instead of one: "We hope this will be beneficial [in helping free up more of the leaders' time]. We are confident that it will."

President Hinckley also announced a sweeping cultural change in the Church missionary program. "The First Presidency and the Twelve, after most prayerful and careful consideration, have reached the decision that the present program of missionary farewells should be modified," President Hinckley announced. He explained that missionaries will be given a few minutes to address the congregation, however, siblings, parents, friends, and others will no longer be allowed to participate. President Hinckley noted that many wards along the Wasatch Front, between missionary farewells and homecomings, rarely have sacrament meetings that are not focused on a leaving or returning Elder or Sister. He also discouraged members from holding "open houses" or other gatherings surrounding missionary departures or homecomings.

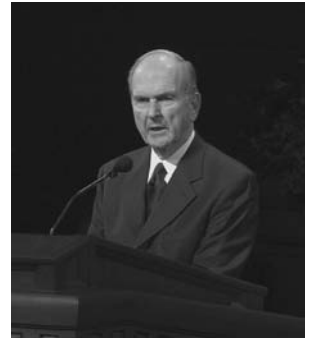
While Latter-day Saints in areas with a high concentration of members, who have missionaries coming and going all the time, may be somewhat relieved by the announcement, Latter-day Saints in other areas will likely be disappointed. In small communities, a missionary farewell and return is a rare occurrence, something that may happen only once every several years.

Earlier in the same session, Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of Twelve Apostles spoke plainly to LDS young men: "Please understand this: the bar that is the standard for missionary service is being raised. The day of the 'repent and go' missionary is over. . . . Some young men have the mistaken idea that they can be involved in sinful behavior and then repent when they're 18 1/2 so they can go on their mission at 19. While it is true that you can repent of sins, you may or you may not qualify to serve." He then urged bishops "to recommend only those young men and women whom you judge to be spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally prepared to face today's realities of missionary work." (For more about this change, see page 4.)

As allegations of child sexual abuse by priests swirled, polarizing the Catholic community and costing that church millions of dollars in damages, President Hinckley sent a harsh message to the priesthood session audience: "I speak of the evil and despicable sin of child abuse. We cannot tolerate it. We will not tolerate it. Anyone who abuses a child may expect Church discipline as well as possible legal action."

One Conference address that garnered national attention and prompted a response from the Church Public Affairs office was Elder Russell M. Nelson's sermon, "Blessed Are the Peacemakers."

Some in the LDS community, and many in the national media, saw Elder Nelson's talk as a call against the immanent war with Iraq. But shortly after the talk made headlines, a Church press release declared: "Some news outlets have misinterpreted a recent general conference address by Elder Russell M. Nelson. Elder Nelson pointed to the example and teachings of the Savior as 'the pathway to peace on earth and good will among men.' He also made plain that the scriptures 'strongly condemn wars of aggression, but sustain obligations of citizens to defend their families and their freedoms.'" (For additional details and a reflection on Elder Nelson's remarks, see page 60.)



*Elder Russell M. Nelson*

### *LDS WOMEN SURVEYED, BUT NO ANSWERS DISCLOSED*

DO CHURCH LEADERS undervalue the contributions of women? Are LDS women who work outside the home criticized by other women in their wards? Why might an LDS woman want to live in the celestial kingdom? These are some of the frank questions addressed by a May 2001 Church-ordered survey on women and the Relief Society. The survey's existence was revealed in an October *Salt Lake Tribune* story by former SUNSTONE editor Peggy Fletcher Stack. Unfortunately, results of official Church surveys are always kept confidential.

Several more questions deal with the role of husbands and priesthood leaders, trying to assess whether women find it hard or easy to work with men at home and in Church capacities. Others ask how women feel about Relief Society meetings, personal enrichment meetings (formerly known as homemaking), service activities, and visiting teaching. The questionnaire also deals with personal religiosity and spirituality.

Five questions deal specifically with emotional well-being and depression—topics that have been the object of much speculation over the years. Studies conducted in the early and mid-1980s debunked the notion that Mormon women are more depressed than non-LDS women, and other recent studies have arrived at similar conclusions (see *Dialogue* [summer 1986], 150–55; Daniel K. Judd, ed., *Religion, Mental Health, and the Latter-Day Saints*, Provo: Brigham Young University, 1991).

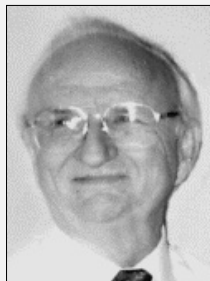
Observers believe that at least five hundred LDS women would have taken the survey, enough to make the results statistically reliable. Despite the potential value of the information the survey might yield, Bonnie Parkin, who was sustained in April as general president of the Relief Society, told the *Salt*

People



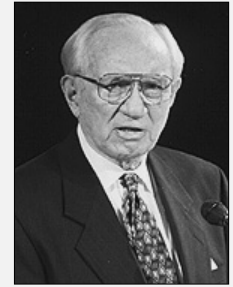
**DIED:** Mormonism lost a kind and courageous voice 18 October, with the passing of **Maclynn O. "Mac" Madsen**, age 68, from a sudden heart attack. Madsen, a former healthy lifestyles professor and golf coach at Weber State University, became known to many when in December 2000, he organized and published a petition with more than three hundred backers in the *Salt Lake Tribune* calling for LDS leaders to enter into a meaningful dialogue about the Church's teachings on homosexuality. Madsen had become energized about making the way smoother for gay Latter-day Saints when he learned his daughter is a lesbian. In addition to working for greater understanding on this issue, Madsen thoughtfully challenged the Church to live up to its ideals in other areas, recently publicizing its ownership and operation of two for-profit hunting preserves. Madsen was a frequent presenter at Sunstone symposiums, and even as he wrote and spoke with great passion, it was easy to tell that his words were inspired by a deep and abiding love for his family, the Church, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sunstone and all who knew Mac will greatly miss him.

**DIED:** Popular writer of Mormon esoterica, **Max B. Skousen**, passed away 16 November at the age of 81. During his colorful career as a scholar and author, Skousen was excommunicated, rebaptized, and then excommunicated once more. In a short explanation of his relationship to Mormonism on his website, <[www.maxskousen.com](http://www.maxskousen.com)>, Skousen wrote: "Although I am a fully dedicated believer in the divine mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and support its leadership on all levels, I willingly and peacefully accepted a loss of membership on the records of the Church in December 1996 for only one reason, which was to share these deeper views of the scriptures among members of the Church. . . . In serving these deeper seekers, I consider myself to be still a full, loyal, non-critical member of His Church on the records in heaven." Among Skousen's better-known books are *How to Pray and Stay Awake* and his four-part series, *A Blessing Hitherto Unknown*, exploring the blessings available to those who put to the test President Ezra Taft Benson's challenge to truly abide by the teachings of the Book of Mormon.



**DECLINED:** **President Gordon B. Hinckley** turned down an invitation to attend a ceremony in Washington, D.C., held by the Caring Institute, honoring him as one of the ten most

caring individuals in America. In explaining the prophet's absence, Church spokesperson Dale Bills noted, "President Hinckley regularly declines invitations for events on Monday nights," and cited the Church's long-time policy encouraging families to spend one night a week together. During the October 2002 General Conference, President Hinckley even appealed to school officials in areas with concentrated populations of Latter-day Saints to consider not scheduling any events or activities on Monday night.



**DEFEATED:** Utah polygamist Tom Green has had at least one reason to smile from his prison cell recently. In the November 2002 election, Juab county prosecutor **David Leavitt** lost his bid to keep his job by just twenty-two votes—less than one percent. Leavitt, the younger brother of Utah governor Mike Leavitt, gained national attention for his aggressive prosecution of Green for polygamy and welfare fraud.

**FAILED:** A write-in campaign designed to send Utahn **Cody Judy** to Washington was defeated when Judy garnered a total of eight votes in November's congressional election. Judy is out of prison after holding then-apostle Howard W. Hunter hostage with a fake bomb during a Brigham Young University devotional. Despite his inability to win the minds of Utah voters, Judy's campaign garnered national attention when it was featured several times on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart."



**CHALLENGED:** When former CES employee **Grant Palmer** walked into Sam Weller's Books in Salt Lake City on 30 November to sign copies of his new book, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, he didn't know what to expect. Palmer's book challenges many conventional and traditional LDS teachings about the early days of Mormonism. Many responded positively to Palmer's comments; however, former BYU political science professor Louis Midgley created several tense moments as he took issue with Palmer's assertions. Midgley quizzed Palmer about his current standing in the Church and his history as an Institute teacher. In an email detailing his reactions to the event, Midgley admitted, "I was aggressive . . . I raised a bit of hell with Palmer."

*Lake Tribune* that she didn't know of the existence of the survey. The study had been commissioned by Parkin's predecessor, Mary Ellen Smoot. Still, Parkin and her counselors seem to be in tune with many of the issues the survey addressed. In a *Salt Lake Tribune* interview shortly after her call to serve, Sister Parkin indicated that one of her presidency's primary goals would be to help all Mormon women feel loved by God. As reported, "they want Mormon women to stop being judged for working or staying at home, being single, divorced or childless. They don't want women to feel alienated and alone."

Surveys such as this are conducted by the Church's Research Information Division. Sources familiar with Church procedures say that once the division gets the questionnaires back, sociologists analyze the raw data and compose results charts that are sent to the General Authorities.

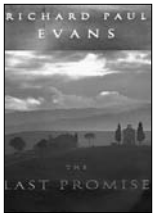
Although the Church never releases the results of its surveys, in the October 1999 General Conference, Elder Ben B. Banks, then executive director of the Research Information Division, mentioned the existence of a recent survey that asked active LDS members who had once been less active what had led them away from full participation and what had helped them become more active again (*Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 9-11).

You may view the complete survey on the Sunstone website, <[www.sunstoneonline.com](http://www.sunstoneonline.com)>.

## UTAH SAINTS HOLD CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL—EN ESPAÑOL

SOME 13,000 HISPANIC Mormons converged on Temple Square on 9 December to participate in a Christmas devotional

### DESERET BOOK REVISES CONTENT STANDARDS FOR BOOKS SOLD



CITING NEW STANDARDS for content, Church-owned bookstore Deseret Book recently declined to carry LDS author Richard Paul Evans's latest novel, a romance titled *The Last Promise*. This newest offering from the author of *The Christmas Box* tells the story of a woman with an abusive husband who finds comfort in the arms of another man. Evans notes, however, that the two never consummate the relationship.

According to *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Deseret News* articles, the chain's new standards stem from a customer survey conducted last year. Queries of more than three hundred regular shoppers indicated that, at some point, most had purchased something from Deseret Book that contradicted their standards. Company president and former Relief Society general counselor, Sheri Dew, was quick to point out that the policy revision is not a moral or religious decision, but a business one. "We have an extensive body of research to show that this title falls out of the guidelines people depend on when shopping in our stores," Dew said.

Dew and other company spokespersons have found themselves repeatedly defending the decision in the media. Their main response is to ask why any store would carry something their customers don't want them to stock. In the course of her defense of the decision regarding Evans's novel, Dew also announced Deseret Book would be reviewing all titles on its shelves and applying the new guidelines to them. The guidelines have few specific criteria but instead ask if a book has "immoral content" that is presented as acceptable, fun, or normal.

Many took exception to Deseret Book's new guidelines, no one more so than Evans, who was surprised his novel didn't qualify under the new

standards. "The book is not about adultery," Evans insisted. "The book would be a PG-rated movie, at the most." Others have joked that the Bible, with its troubling tales of drunkenness (Noah), lying (Abraham), or incest (Lot), might be next to go at Deseret Book. Others, like Eric Snider, an online humorist whose column "Snide Remarks" can be seen at <[www.ericSnider.com](http://www.ericSnider.com)>, have asked more philosophical questions: "There are a lot of gray areas in life, and this book explores one of them. In the world of Deseret Book, however, there is no gray, only black and white (mostly white). [Deseret Book] apparently doesn't want to burden its customers by making them think about the gray areas, the parts where divorce is sometimes the best option, and where a close friendship is more valuable than a dead marriage."

Deseret Book's decision apparently did not affect sales or diminish the enthusiasm of Evans's fans. In a recent radio interview, Evans said that shortly after the ban was announced, he receiving a standing ovation as he arrived for a book signing at a Barnes and Noble bookstore in Bountiful, Utah.



"WHAT KIND OF SICKO WRITES ABOUT A MOTHER LEAVING TWO LITTLE KIDS AT HOME WHO ARE THEN TERRORIZED BY AN INTRUDER ?!!"

## *Celluloid Watch*

### **Festival Celebrates LDS Film**

WITH SCREENINGS, ROUNDTABLES, competitions, and some 1,500 people in attendance, the second LDS Movie Festival took place 13–16 November in Provo, Utah. Organized by BYU film students, the festival features LDS filmmakers and celebrates the diversity of Mormon movies.

While *God's Army* cost \$240,000 to make, and *The Singles Ward* had a budget of \$400,000, young LDS filmmakers usually express themselves through projects with even lower budgets. This year's festival included a video marathon in which competing teams were given 24 hours to shoot, edit, and deliver a short film based on an assigned theme. More than thirty teams participated in the marathon.

"For me, the festival is about trying to explore themes and ideas," says Lee Stratford, a festival participant and BYU student majoring in film. "We have to think of ways to help filmmakers and audiences get better educated so that they can explore things that really matter in very meaningful ways."

For more information about the LDS film festival, go to <[www.ldsbox.com](http://www.ldsbox.com)>.

### **Tom Cruise, Men of Small Stature, Need Not Apply**

WRITER AND DIRECTOR Gary Rogers is still looking for the hunk who will play the part of Nephi in *The Book of Mormon Movie, Volume 1*. "Must be large in stature," reads the casting

call. "Minimum of 6'1", or preferably taller. Must be muscular and have a 'leading man' face."

In a *Deseret News* interview regarding casting, Rogers said he thought having a celebrity in a main role would detract from the film's effectiveness: "Tom Cruise playing Nephi or Jack Nicholson playing Lehi just wouldn't work. They bring too much baggage with them, not to mention their enormous price tag."

With music by former Mormon Tabernacle Choir associate conductor Robert C. Bowden, volume 1 of this ambitious, multi-million dollar series could reach the silver screen as early as 2003. In order to fund the project, Rogers recently sold his TV company in addition to securing independent financing.

Although the LDS Church has already produced several short films based on episodes from the Book of Mormon—as well as the full-length *The Testaments of One Fold and One Shepherd*—this will be the first independent attempt to put the 1,000-year long epic in celluloid.

For more information about the film, visit its website, <[www.bookofmormonmovie.com](http://www.bookofmormonmovie.com)>. Information about several other LDS movie projects in the works is available at <[www.ldsfilm.com](http://www.ldsfilm.com)>.



*Laban's Palace boasts a massive stone façade*

conducted entirely in Spanish. Originally scheduled for the Tabernacle but later moved to the Conference Center, the event was the largest gathering of Hispanic Mormons in Utah history.

Elder Richard G. Scott, who learned Spanish as a missionary in Uruguay, advised Hispanic members to keep cultural traditions that are compatible with LDS teachings. Other speakers included Elder M. Russell Ballard, who spoke through a translator, and Elder Boyd K. Packer, who added some brief, unscheduled comments.

Elder Cree-L Kofford, of the Quorum of the Seventy, announced that next year, the Church will open twenty-five English language schools for immigrants who live along the Wasatch front.

Spanish is now the second most widely used language in the Church, and statisticians predict that by 2012, it will become number one. Although there are five native Spanish-speakers serving in the First and Second Quorums of Seventy, none of them spoke at the devotional.

## **CHURCH REAFFIRMS POLICY REGARDING TEMPLE WORK FOR JEWS**

LDS CHURCH LEADERS recently met with representatives of the Jewish community to discuss a 1995 agreement declaring that the Church will not perform temple work for Holocaust

victims nor other deceased Jews. After finding approximately 20,000 Jews that had been added to the LDS genealogical database in the past several years, independent researcher Helen Radkey accused the Church of violating its agreement. However, following a 10 December meeting between Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Presidency of the Seventy and Ernest Michel of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Victims, both groups acknowledged the Church has not changed its position. Instead, it appears the Church has had trouble creating a system that can guarantee no temple ordinances will be performed for deceased Jews. Michel noted, "Certain cracks . . . have appeared that have caused trouble with some members of the Jewish community." Through Elder Christofferson, the Church has reaffirmed its policy to do what it can to prevent names of deceased Jews from entering the genealogical database that supplies LDS temples with candidates for the vicarious ordinances.

## **COUNTERPOINT CONFERENCE EMPHASIZES MAKING CONNECTIONS**

THE MORMON WOMEN'S Forum held its annual Counterpoint Conference 16 November at the University of Utah Alumni house. Among the featured speakers addressing this year's theme, "Finding a Place—Creating a Space: How Women Make Connections in Public and Private," were

Margaret Toscano and a panel of young LDS women who addressed the question, "Is there a place for intelligent young women in the Church?" Toscano alluded to her experiences participating in a recent Harvard University conference of religious feminists in which she spoke about how many religious feminists feel marginalized by both their own religious community as well as by many other feminists, albeit for opposite reasons. In her remarks on the panel of young women, Ray Allred, a doctoral candidate at the University of Washington, noted that the problem is not that inequality for women exists in the Church, but the "reticence on the part of [Mormon] culture to seek answers" to it. Martha Sonntag Bradley gave the conference's keynote speech, titled, "Our Power Lies in Hidden Places."



Margaret Toscano

## MORMON FOCUS AT SSSR

THE SOCIETY FOR the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) held its 2002 Annual Meeting, 1-3 November, in Salt Lake City. Of its more than one hundred sessions, six featured papers or panels dealing directly with Mormonism. Topics in these sessions ranged from Carrie Miles's study of the Church's response to societal change in women's roles, to a report by



Armand Mauss responds to SSSR panel honoring him.

Tim Heaton and three others about LDS employment services, to Daryl White and Michael Nielsen's examination of personal grooming as a measure of faithfulness in Mormon culture.

BYU's Marie Cornwall gave a plenary address titled, "Gender and Religion in Comparative Perspective: In Search of a Paradigm," and a special panel session paid tribute to Armand L. Mauss, author of *The Angel and the Beehive* and the forthcoming *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage*, for his many contributions to Mormon and other religious studies. Mauss is a former president of both the SSSR and the Mormon Social Science Association.

## FORUM DISCUSSES SUICIDE PREVENTION AMONG MORMONS

DURING AN OCTOBER event sponsored by LDS Family Fellowship, Ogden suicidologist Mark K. Malan spoke on preventing psychosexual shame suicide among Mormons.

In studies Malan conducted in Utah and California, some LDS students attributed their suicidal thoughts to distress and shame over masturbation questions asked during worthiness interviews. Catholic students did not. Malan attributes the difference to confessionary practices: While Catholic priests do not ask youth specifically about masturbation, Mormon bishops are often more inquisitorial. By being less inquisitive,

Malan told his audience, LDS bishops could prevent the psychosexual shame that leads some young Mormons to suicide.

The connection between LDS masturbation shame and suicide was highlighted in October 1983, when Eugene Eliason filed a \$26 million wrongful-death suit against the Church, alleging that stern LDS counseling against masturbation had led his sixteen-year-old son Kip to kill himself. More recently, LDS bishops have been instructed to avoid discussing morality issues that may "arouse curiosity or experimentation," and the new *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet addresses masturbation only euphemistically (see SUNSTONE, Apr. 2002, 76).



Mark Malan argues certain interview practices may put LDS youth at a higher risk for suicide.

Even though a 1990 study concluded that BYU students have a lower rate of suicidal thoughts and attempts than other college students nationally, for the last ten years, Utah has been among one of the fifteen states with the highest suicide rates. According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Utah ranks among the top three states for suicide rates of males between fifteen and nineteen.

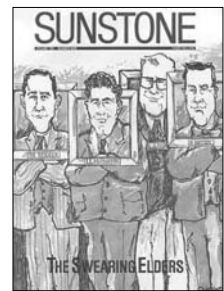
Suicide has been a particular concern for organizations that seek to serve gay Mormons. Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons has documented twenty cases of gay Mormons who have committed suicide since the 1960s, and the suicides of three gay Mormons in 2000 received widespread media attention (see SUNSTONE, Apr., 2001, 90-91).]

Family Fellowship is a Mormon organization dedicated to strengthening families with homosexual members. For more information about this organization, visit <<http://www.ldsfamilyfellowship.org>>.

## HAPPY HOMECOMING FOR THE "SWEARING ELDERS"

HISTORIAN BRIGHAM MADSEN and English professor William Mulder shared a few laughs as they reminisced about the "Swearing Elders," a group of LDS professors and intellectuals who held Mormon forums at the University of Utah from 1948 to 1956. Their reunion took place 12 November at an event sponsored by the Mormon Studies Brown Bag Series at the University of Utah.

A predecessor to forums such as the Sunstone symposium, the Swearing Elders were, according to Thomas A. Blakely, "the first generation of modern Mormon intellectuals," the first to apply critical methodologies to various Mormon topics (SUNSTONE, Jan. 1986). "The tone [of the meetings] was not of ridicule," says Mulder. "It was an earnest endeavor to learn what non-Mormon historians and sociologists were discovering as the most interesting aspects of Mormonism."



Cover, January 1986  
SUNSTONE