

The appearance of a new handbook of policies and procedures in the fall of 1998 prompted a vigorous analysis on 12 January 1999 at the quarterly meeting of the Mormon Alliance. Probing "Doctrine and Practice: The New Church Handbook of Instruction" were panelists Marti L. Jones, who also moderated; Maxine Hanks, writer, editor, and specialist on Mormon feminism; and Britt Abraham, former victim advocate for rape recovery.

The handbook has not been thoroughly revised since March 1989; but that *General Handbook of Instructions* has been replaced by the *Church Handbook of Instructions*, Vol. 1 (for stake presidencies and bishoprics, Vol. 2 for auxiliary leaders). Marti summarized some of the major changes:

1. Definitions of callings. She concluded that, as has been noted at conference critiques over the past five years or so, that the authority of the prophet, seer, and revelator, is now "more broadly shared among the top fifteen men," which she interpreted as a "dilution" of exclusivity. The growth of the Church is reflected generally in the revisions among the callings of Seventies, including the creation of four quorums, the elimination of regional offices, and the creation of area authority seventies as a new category. On the stake level, the duties and

responsibilities of the stake president are basically the same but have been reorganized into four classifications. Similar consolidating is seen in the addition of a section on single adults which was not in the 1989 handbook but which no doubt had existed earlier in a separate manual.

2. Worthiness interviews. Marti noted that whereas several types of interviews in the 1989 handbook were mandated as "searching," this adjective was used in only one place in the 1998 handbook. She saw as pluses new instructions to interviewers to safeguard the interviewee's privacy, to listen carefully, and to be sure that members understood the questions.

3. Ordinances and baptisms. Those who have received abortions, engaged in homosexual acts, or had elective transsexual surgery must be interviewed by the mission president and cleared for baptism. In the case of those who are cohabitating without marriage, the mission president cannot delegate the interview to his counselors, but the policy does not absolutely forbid marriage if cohabitation continues. Members of the audience proposed two possible circumstances that would make this apparently puzzling policy actually "humane": first, in some African nations, legal marriages cannot be performed without meeting tribal requirements of a dowry, which are sometimes financially impossible; and in strongly Catholic countries like Chile where divorce is virtually impossible, many couples have long-term stable unions that cannot be legally solemnized.

4. Abortions. The policy on abortion has been broadened beyond forbidding women to receive abortions: "Members must not submit to, perform, encourage, pay for, or arrange for an abortion." This policy would include parents, the prospective father, and even doctors. (The exceptions—rape or incest, the mother's life endangered, and fatal birth defects—have not changed from the 1989 handbook.)

5. Baptisms of children of polygamists must be cleared by the First Presidency after the bishop and stake president have satisfied themselves that the children "repudiate" the teachings of their parents. (Formerly, the bishop, if satisfied, could authorize the baptism.) This provision startled some listeners.

## CONFERENCE CRITIQUE TO MEET

Does the Church has an "ediface complex" or is it the "new gathering"? Observers noting the 1999 countdown toward the (as yet unnamed "great hall") and the plunge toward 100 temples by 2000 have pointed out that corporate Mormonism beyond the ward level is increasingly experienced "en gigantic mass" as sports arenas and coliseums become the setting for gatherings of thousands.

Come analyze trends, developments, gospel themes, social emphases, and internal political coalitions with other serious conference watchers at the traditional Conference Critique, held on Monday, 5 April 1999 in the second-floor conference room of the main library, 209 E. 500 South, Salt Lake City, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

The all-participant discussion format allows for a more interactive exchange and a broader range of point of views. Don't overlook the Young Women's broadcast on 27 March or the general priesthood session.

"You don't have to disavow your parents' religion for any other church to become a Mormon," pointed out one listener. "It doesn't matter whether they're Catholic, Protestant, Jewish--whatever." Marti hypothesized that this restriction stemmed from concern in the 1940s that some younger members of polygamous families were going through the temple, then readopting their parents' beliefs. Another participant pointed out that most fundamentalists no longer believe that temple ceremonies have divine validity, prompting a third to query, "So this provision is slamming the barn door when the back wall is missing?" Maxine confirmed, through a conversation she had had recently with a Church public relations spokesperson, that "the Church was very unhappy with all of the publicity about polygamy last year. It fears that people will confuse polygamists with the mainstream Church." Another listener pointed out the irony that the Church is denying and denouncing members who practice polygamy while it itself has not yet repudiated either the doctrine or the de facto practice.

6. Marti noted two "mysteries": the handbook forbids dedicating water for baptisms. No one had ever heard of water being dedicated for such a purpose, but there was general agreement that "somebody must have been doing it if there was a policy forbidding it." The second mystery was that the new handbook specifically states that it does not supersede the bulletin of March 1993, but it did not say what this bulletin was. No one present knew.

7. Questions about the temple should be taken to the bishop and stake president. Formerly, the temple president was also allowed to answer questions about the temple.

8. The complicated policy involving who may be sealed to whom showed some slight "improvement," according to Marti, in that women can request a cancellation of sealing without "a husband in the wings." (Formerly women could not request a cancellation of sealing unless they planned to be married immediately.) Furthermore, in another difference, the husband is also required to get a "clearance" to be sealed to another wife whether the sealing to the first was cancelled or not. (Formerly, he was not required to get such a clearance.) A heated discussion ensued, since several people knew women who had not been allowed to cancel a sealing to an abusive spouse, women whose courtship opportunities were curtailed after divorce because Mormon men were not interested in marrying someone who was sealed to another man, or children whose biological father would purportedly not be their father in the next life because their

mother was sealed to a first husband and he therefore had claims on all of her children.

"When the Church is legislating relationships to the degree that they do, insoluble problems are going to develop," pointed out one woman.

"I'd rather trust in the love of God than in the Church's legalities," announced another member of the audience.

Several people noted that bishops had basically given the same "comfort" to people in perplexing situations, but, as Marti pointed out, "Because of the Proclamation on the Family, policies regarding gender issues have become live-or-die issues," while Janice Allred commented, "It's not that simple. If you take the temple seriously at all, then you have to take these policies seriously. Otherwise, what does a temple sealing mean? Is it just a nice idea or what?"

9. The requirements for missionaries who confess transgressions that happened before their mission have been stiffened; whereas earlier such matters might be resolved with the mission president, now the probability is that the missionary will be sent home.

10. When a member is excommunicated, the bishop is supposed to ask permission to keep his/her name on a list of former members. If the person agrees and then moves from the ward, the bishop contacts the person's new bishop and communicates "relevant information about the disciplinary action." If the person does not give consent and then moves, the bishop contacts the new bishop, "indicates that a disciplinary council has been held and that the person has requested that no further information be shared and no contact be made" (101).

11. Some of the specifications for ward clerks (requiring them to hold temple recommends and be Melchizedek Priesthood holders) now definitively close the loophole by which some women had served as assistant ward clerks.

12. Stake presidents and bishops should avoid making members' decisions for them, counseling them to divorce, or counseling them on whom they may marry. When interviewing young people about moral cleanliness, they should adapt the questions to the interviewee's age and not arouse "curiosity or experimentation."

13. Nonmembers were formerly permitted to be organists; now they can be organists, choristers, or assistant Scoutmasters.

14. Marti also noted that, according to the

restrictions listed in Volume 1, only three women in the Church are authorized to possess the *Church Handbook of Instructions*; the general presidents of the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary. One man, after reading the *Church News* article on the two volumes, telephoned the distribution center and asked to order the second volume. The operator who answered his call was none too cordial, as he described her, and immediately demanded, "Why do you want one?"

"I'd like to read what it says," he returned.

"You can't do that. It's restricted to bishops and stake presidents."

"According to the *Church News*," he answered mildly, "everybody can see the second volume."

"No, they can't," she snapped. "You can see photocopies of sections out of it."

"So, I could get photocopies of all of the sections out of Volume 2—in other words, a complete copy of the contents of Volume 2—but I still couldn't buy Volume 2?" he queried.

"That's right."

He gave it up.

Maxine Hanks, contrasting the 1989 statement on birth control to the 1998 statement called it "the most lenient language, the most progressive, and the least intrusive statement historically on Mormon parenthood, an extremely significant shift." She pointed out three differences: First, it defines parenthood as a "privilege" rather than as a "duty" or a "commandment." Second, it does not specify a number of children or imply that couples should never limit the number of their children, and third, it also validates sexual relations as an expression of love. "This isn't a new provision, but it's never been

spelled out so clearly before," she observed. "It crosses the line between mandated duty and free agency—at least rhetorically. I want to thank the apostles or the editors or the Strengthening and Lengthening Church Members Committee or whoever was responsible for this statement."

Her second point was that the statement was "too late for most of us over the age of twenty. We grew up with the other rhetoric." She read statements dating back to 1908 in which Joseph F. Smith said it was "ungodly" to prevent conception, that those who do will "reap disappointment by and by," that "prevention" is "wrong" except for the "weak and sickly."

Then she zeroed in on the conundrum posed by the statement. "Even though this statement provides a different option than the earlier rhetoric of mandate and commandment, what it shows is the conflict of rhetoric. The Proclamation on the Family in 1995 is more extreme. It refers to procreation as a 'commandment' that 'remains in force.' It's a 'solemn responsibility' and people will be 'held accountable' for it. It basically makes parenthood compulsory. Which is more compulsory—the proclamation or the handbook?"

"Especially," as one participant pointed out, "you can't see the handbook and the proclamation is supposed to be on every refrigerator door."

Corroborative evidence came from the policy in the new handbook on "surgical sterilization" which was strongly discouraged. The couple should consult medical experts and their bishop in addition to receiving divine guidance, as one member of the audience noted, "It doesn't make it very optional."

Janice Allred commented, "It also makes the family the fundamental unit of society. There is no room for the individual. You do not exist except as part of a family. That really does make families compulsory."

Maxine summarized: "People who listen to the rhetoric and shape their lives by it are betrayed when the rhetoric changes. If all of these changes tell us nothing else, they tell us to reserve final authority to ourselves. The leaders are going to change the rhetoric. They're going to betray us in five years or next week or on Larry King Live or wherever they need to. I'm not advocating ignoring conference talks or handbooks. I'm just saying to consider everything and then make your own decisions."

Britt Abraham read a personal essay based on her experiences in a small Utah town, called, "What You Always Wanted to Know about the Manual but Were Afraid to Ask." In a situation, the details of

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which she did not specify, she described a conflict between the bishop and a close friend which also drew her into it, and organized her essay around the lessons she learned from that conflict that the handbook didn't tell her--not that she had access to it.

1. The bishop was amazed that I wanted corroborating revelation when he called me to a position.

2. A bishop can knowingly or ignorantly abuse his power. In the case of her friend, because she wanted to keep to herself, the bishop felt that he needed to influence her children. He went to her home at a time when he thought she would be gone. When the children refused to let him in, he walked around the house knocking on doors and windows, then gained entrance into the garage. Unbeknownst to him, the woman was home and called the police. They body-searched him, warned him against trespassing, and released him.

3. The bishop tried to take Britt's temple recommend but "could not confound me, and that really was a fulfillment of Luke 12:11-12 that the Spirit will teach you what to speak, because it didn't happen in other areas of my life." This conflict went on for more than a year.

4. Members and officers of the ward will visit, and you have a right to ask if it's an official visit in which they're trying to collect information or whether it's a neighborly visit.

5. Even the bishop didn't know that you can pay tithes and offerings directly to Church head-

quarters and that there is a procedure set up to make it possible and to assure confidentiality in the amounts. The bishop called Britt's husband a liar when he said this but, after checking it out, was abashed and gave them their temple recommends. While the first angry meeting was going on inside the bishop's office, Britt sitting outside, could hear the ward clerks reading off a list of names and amounts paid as tithing and mentioned this as one reason why they preferred to pay their tithing directly to the Church. Most members do not know that the bishop is not permitted to ask them any questions about tithing except whether they are full tithe-payers or not.

6. Most members do not feel that they have the right to say no to authoritative requests, however invasive or improper. Britt described the pain of a recently bereaved widow, who, at the bishop's request, told a priesthood meeting about how inadequately prepared she was to assume the family's financial responsibilities. It was extremely painful and humiliating for her but she felt she could not refuse or the bishop would cut off her welfare.

7. Most members do not know that they have the right to move their records to another ward.

The point that most members of the audience felt most keenly about was the inaccessibility of the handbook. (See also guest editorial "An End to Secrets.") With considerable heat, one man asked, "How can you be judged, tried, and condemned by a book of rules you can't read? that's an outrageous violation of due process, guaranteed by the fifth and fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution. And the due process language starts with Magna Carta on June 14, 1215 at Runnymede. How can the Church claim that the Constitution is divinely inspired in secular matters and then claim that it has no application in the ecclesiastical realm?"

Britt hypothesized that accessibility may be restricted because "there are a lot of phone numbers to call at Church headquarters if the bishop needs help, and maybe they don't want a lot of prank calls."

Others saw a darker explanation: "It's a power thing," said one. "Knowledge is power, and anyone who has information has power over those who don't."

"The reason the Church doesn't honor due process," explained another woman, is that the model is the family. It's not a democracy, a society of equals. In the family system, the father's authority is absolute and arbitrary but it doesn't need checks and balances because the presumption is that he is always righteous. In the Church system,

## ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENT

The Mormon Alliance was incorporated on July 4, 1992. Its purposes are to identify and document ecclesiastical/spiritual abuse, to promote healing and closure for its survivors, to build more sensitive leadership, to empower LDS members to participate with more authenticity in Mormonism, and to foster a healthier religious community.

By Common Consent is the quarterly newsletter of the Mormon Alliance, published in January, March, July, and September. Letters, articles, and guest editorials are welcome. Subscriptions are \$30 for each calendar year and should be mailed to the Mormon Alliance, 6337 S. Highland Drive, Mailbox 215, Salt Lake City, UT 84121. At any point during the year that a subscription begins, you will receive the four newsletters of that year and the Case Reports volume for that year.

Copies of earlier Case Reports (1995, 1996, and 1997) are available from Signature Books for \$20 apiece (price includes shipping) at 564 W. 400 North, Salt Lake City, UT 84116. The order line is (801) 531-0164.

To report cases of ecclesiastical and spiritual abuse, contact Lavina Fielding Anderson, 1519 Roberta Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84115 (801) 467-1617. Please send newsletter submissions and changes of address here as well.

the Church leaders take the place of the father. The Church system is seen as superior to democracy."

Another woman agreed: "At Church, you have rights because you're perceived as righteous--always by the leaders. If you're not perceived as righteous, then you have no rights."

Guest Editorial

## AN END TO SECRETS

*Toni Clement*

Stake presidencies and bishoprics throughout the Church have received English copies of the new *Church Handbook of Instructions* (CHI), with translations to follow over the next few months. Regardless of locale, this manual became effective Churchwide as of January. It replaces the *General Handbook of Instructions*, which has not been revised significantly since 1989. Although the CHI will be accompanied by a separate handbook for use by priesthood and auxiliary leaders, the CHI will continue to be kept from the eyes of ordinary members.

Have you ever tried to play a game where you did not know all the rules? Have you ever had to negotiate when one of the parties did not know what was going on? In either of those situations, the side with the best information wins. Knowledge is power; and in the case of the CHI, knowledge is also authority, or at least the prerogative of authority.

It is difficult to see how the Church is served by keeping its rules of conduct and government hidden from those governed. This is especially problematic when a Church leader initiates some action or investigation based on a reading of the handbook, which is not justifiable in retrospect. It recalls the Catholic church during medieval times, which kept the Bible out of the hands of non-clergy. Priests and popes interpreted the Bible to their liking, without regard for context or translation. One of Martin Luther's contributions was to circulate the Bible in the vernacular, in effect democratizing the scriptures. By publicizing the basis of Catholic spirituality, he sought to make the Church more accountable. Why is the Church of Jesus Christ avoiding this simple gesture of fairness?

Exclusive access to the rules implies exclusive right to interpret those rules. The rules themselves become a manifestation of authority. To attempt to question them or interpret them becomes a challenge to authority. This dynamic also becomes clear when one tries to study the past history of the

handbooks. Historians interested in studying Church government have a difficult time finding copies of the handbooks because when a new handbook is released, old copies are supposed to be gathered up and destroyed. In one sense, this is understandable; old copies could create confusion or give people the idea that some policy was current when it had been changed. There is nothing wrong with maintaining consistency. But one need not erase the records of what was.

If the latest editions are known and identified accordingly, the need to destroy old copies vanishes. In the here and now, a challenge to current rules may prevent their misapplication or promote their revision in the direction of justice and greater compassion. The recent conflicts between the Church hierarchy and members who are doctrinally eccentric highlight the need for all members to become familiar with the CHI and have a voice in its application and development.

But I wonder if it is only about consistency, at least in the bureaucratic sense. In the modern Mormon leadership, consistency is an essential part of the perceived legitimacy of the leadership hierarchy. Mormons are told or led to believe that policies and doctrines do not change significantly. Earlier copies of the *Handbook* dispute this notion. Sometimes they indicate why a policy was originally instituted and thus shows that the policy's continuance makes no sense because the original problem has long since passed.

The secrecy surrounding the CHI is obsolete, except for preserving a mystique of all-encompassing wisdom or intimidating those the Church wishes to discipline. Judgment always flirts with error. To imply claims of unquestionable knowledge is monstrous. These claims violate the idea that ordinary members have a part in governing the Church. Secrecy is diabolically opposed to the notion that the only acceptable expression of authority is reason, persuasion, and love. These things cannot flourish in a context of covert laws. Secrecy mocks the law of common consent, now a historical anachronism. Most of all it constricts us to be acted upon, and not to act. Its time is past. Put these handbooks in the Distribution Center. Put ordering information about them in the *Ensign*.

## A PERSONAL THANK YOU

*Lavina Fielding Anderson*

At the end of 1998, a subscriber renewed his subscription--not really news, you might think, but he did it for the next four years. It was a material expression of faith in the continuity of the Mormon



Alliance and a solid vote of confidence that its work matters.

Thanks to all of those who, having walked through their own pain are willing to reach a hand to those still struggling with theirs, who understand that the desire for justice is not a thirst for vengeance, who have faith that institutions as well as individuals can repent, know better, and do better.

#### LATE BUT STILL ON THE SCHEDULE . . .

The 1998 volume of the *Case Reports*, late but in line and inching up, will be a documentary history of the 1993-97 excommunications and firings. The first part will provide narrative overview of dates, events, places--basically a summary of what happened. The second part will consist of personal accounts talking about these events "from the inside." More than the "September Six," these reports will include the departures from BYU of Cecilia Konchar Farr, David C. Knowlton, Brian Evenson, Gail Turley Houston, and Steve Epperson, and the disciplinary actions against Lynne Kanavel Whitesides Avraham Gileadi, Paul J. Toscano, Maxine Hanks, Lavina Fielding Anderson, D. Michael Quinn, David P. Wright, Michael Barrett, Brent Metcalfe, and Janice Merrill Allred.

The 1999 volume of *Case Reports* will focus on the third of Elder Packer's trio of clear and present dangers to the Church: feminism. Commented coeditor Lavina Fielding Anderson: "Our reason for this focus is simply that women experience many aspects of the Church very differently from men." Such differences include structural and power inequalities, the preemption of wom

en's voices by male voices in Relief Society manuals, the assumption that all women have husbands who therefore represent "the family," the assumption that there is such a thing as "the" family, and the assumption that families, rather than individuals, are the basic "unit."

#### THE NAMELESS

*Rita Bowles*

Noah, your wife's name is mystery.  
I only know her stone thoughts  
and the weight of her woman's heart  
on salt water  
waiting for a bird to lift it;  
waiting for the Love of God  
to feather the sky  
and bend it with color.

Noah, did she know  
the outcome of your progeny  
would not measure a cubit's  
difference from Eve's?  
With three sons and the same  
mother-knowledge, did she only lack  
faith in the gopherwood of human nature  
to bend sufficiently? Did she  
request her name withheld?

Lot's wife understood.  
She'd heard God's claim  
that He would not again curse the earth  
for man's sake,  
and merely lacked faith  
in the arcing covenant  
of Almighty Promise.  
A column of tears,  
she turned readily to salt  
and hid from the future  
of her nameless daughters.

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