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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Mormon Podcaster and Scholar John Dehlin Threatened with Excommunication

Summary: As a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS or Mormon church), I have been summoned by my LDS Stake President, [Dr. Bryan King](#), to appear before a disciplinary council to be held on January 25, 2015 at the North Logan Utah Stake Center, located 2750 North 800 East, North Logan, Utah beginning at 6 p.m. The charge is apostasy, and I have been informed that the likely outcome of the disciplinary council will be either disfellowshipment (i.e., official censure) or excommunication (i.e., termination of my membership). The main items specifically mentioned to me by President Bryan King and Bishop Brian Hunt as contributing to my alleged apostasy include:

- 1) My 10-year effort with Mormon Stories podcast (<http://mormonstories.org>), wherein difficult historical and cultural issues are discussed in an interview format.
- 2) [My public support of same-sex marriage.](#)
- 3) [My public support of the Ordain Women movement.](#)
- 4) My publicly expressed doubts regarding key elements of orthodox LDS theology.
- 5) My publicly expressed criticism of the church's approach to LGBT members, feminists, intellectuals, as well as its lack of transparency regarding finances.

While my family and I would prefer to be left alone by LDS church leadership at this time, I would much rather face excommunication than disavow my moral convictions. In the coming weeks, months, and years ahead, it is my intent to provide increased support to Mormons who are transitioning away from orthodoxy.

Bio: John Dehlin is the founder of Mormon Stories Podcast (<http://mormonstories.org>). He is a former employee of Bain & Company, Microsoft Corporation, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Utah State University's Department of Clinical, Counseling, and School Psychology. John's research interests involve the nexus of religion and mental

health, and his research has been accepted for publication in numerous peer reviewed scientific journals including the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *Behavior Modification*, the *Journal of Homosexuality*, the *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, and *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*. John's work has been featured on ABC's *Good Morning America* and *Nightline*, as well as in the *New York Times*.

Background

In 2001 I was called to serve as an early morning seminary teacher for the LDS church while working for Microsoft in Washington state. During that time, I began to study LDS church history in depth with the intent of strengthening my beliefs about the church, and becoming a better teacher. While studying, I discovered many very troubling and hard-to-find historical facts regarding the church, which included:

- 1) Joseph Smith, LDS church founder, married over 30 women, some as young as 14, and 11 women who were already married to other living men. (<https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo?lang=eng>).
- 2) That Joseph Smith concealed the practice of polygamy from his wife and close associates for many years, and publicly lied about his practice.
- 3) That when some young and vulnerable women declined Joseph Smith's proposals, Joseph Smith would publicly slander them to protect his own reputation. When his own wife, Emma, objected to the practice, Joseph told her that she would be "destroyed" if she continued to object (D&C 132:54; <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/132>).
- 4) The Book of Abraham, which claims to be a translation of ancient Egyptian papyrus purchased by Joseph Smith, is not, in fact, a translation of the papyrus, and that by the LDS church's own recent admission, the papyrus does not even mention the word Abraham anywhere in the text (see <https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng>).
- 5) The Book of Mormon, which claims to be a translation of ancient Native American records written by Israelite descendants between 600 B.C. and 400 A.D., posits a version of the ancient Americas that more resembles the Roman Empire than the pre-Columbian Americas, mentioning several anachronisms such as horses, sheep, cattle, steel swords, chariots, wheat, and barley, which never existed in the Americas during that time period (<http://mormonstories.org/michael-coe-an-outsiders-view-of-book-of-mormon-archaeology/>). In addition, a vast accumulation of archaeological, anthropological, linguistic, and genetic discoveries provide conclusive evidence that Native Americans descended from Asia, and not from Israel, as LDS church leaders have consistently taught for over 170 years (<http://cesletter.com>; <http://mormonstories.org/simon-southerton-dna-lamanites-and-the-book-of-mormon/>).

- 6) The LDS church has a long history of attempting to silence and/or punish the courageous individuals who tried to speak openly about these, and other historical problems (e.g., [Juanita Brooks](#), [Fawn Brodie](#), [Michael Quinn](#), [Grant Palmer](#)).

This accumulation of evidence served to unsettle and transform my world. Consequently, I spent several depressed years trying to reconcile these facts with the church that I loved (and still love). When I discovered that many of my LDS colleagues at Microsoft were also experiencing severe depression and distress over these issues, and that many of their marriages were in jeopardy because of their doubt or disbelief, my wife (Margi) and I made the very difficult decision to leave Microsoft in 2004 to try to be a part of the solution.

In 2005, I started Mormon Stories podcast (<http://mormonstories.org>). At the time, I had been inspired by writers such as [Lowell Bennion](#), [Eugene England](#), and [Leonard Arrington](#) – all of whom had been aware of these difficult historical issues in the 1960s and 1970s, were eventually punished in one way or another for their open discussion of these issues, but who had found a way to remain faithful to the church. My goals with Mormon Stories were to:

- 1) Help bring awareness to these difficult and hidden issues, so that others would not be blindsided by the information.
- 2) Help to model the thoughtful, balanced, yet faithful discussion of these topics.
- 3) Begin to provide support for the thousands of current and former LDS church members I have encountered whose mental health, marriages, and/or extended familial and social relationships were continually jeopardized by the discovery of these troubling facts (since the LDS church continued to hide this information, and punish those who spoken openly about it).

As years progressed, I gained increased awareness of other unsettling aspects of LDS church culture such as gender inequality and the church's [damaging treatment of its gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender members](#). Given the [high rates of suicide of LDS LGBT youth](#), I earnestly sought to develop and nurture [research and resources for LDS LGBT church members](#), and for those who struggled to stay in the LDS church after experiencing a crisis of faith (<http://staylds.com>, <http://mormonmatters>, and <http://athoughtfulfaith>). In 2011, I also worked both directly and indirectly with LDS church leadership, teaming with several close friends, to conduct a large survey to better understand why so many educated LDS church members are leaving the church (<http://www.whymormonsquestion.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Survey-Results-Understanding-Mormon-Disbelief-Mar20121.pdf>). I have been told from sources within LDS church headquarters that all of these efforts were important parts of the LDS church's [new initiative to be more forthcoming about its history](#).

Investigations. Over the past ten years of my work with Mormon Stories podcast, my local LDS authorities have initiated formal investigations of my work on at least

three separate occasions. Instead of feeling supported in my earnest efforts to alleviate suffering within the church, these investigations have always felt very intrusive, threatening, and coercive to my family and me. I could never fully understand why the church would continue to harass me when I was working so hard (along with many others) to provide much needed aid, comfort, and support to struggling church members – especially when the church itself had done virtually nothing over the years to support these people in desperate need.

The first investigation was in March, 2007 – which ended in my exoneration. The second began in May, 2011 – during which I spent well over a year meeting almost weekly with my former stake president, Mark Jensen. During these discussions with President Jensen, I was fully open and honest about my doubts regarding key aspects of LDS theology. Nonetheless, at the conclusion of these discussions, *President Jensen concluded that in spite of my doubts and disbelief, I was worthy to remain a member of the church, and to baptize and confirm my son. From this time to the present, my love of and positive feelings for the Mormon community, along with my doubts and disbelief about LDS theology, have not changed.*

While I concluded my ongoing discussions with President Jensen in early 2013 content to remain a member in good standing, several prior and subsequent events began to make me feel increasingly concerned about the way the LDS church treats its struggling members, often leading to people losing the support of their families and social support networks, their livelihoods, and even, in case of LGBT church members, their lives.

In June of 2012, I interviewed a former London, England, U.K. stake president ([Tom Phillips](#)) who provided details of his experience receiving a secret LDS church temple ordinance, called the “Second Anointing,” during which he was anointed directly by LDS apostle M. Russell Ballard, and “sealed up to eternal life” (promising him exaltation in heaven). In this interview Tom also detailed how he subsequently lost his faith in the LDS church, and had several [unpleasant interactions](#) with Elder Jeffrey R. Holland as he tried to reconcile, and receive support for his shattered beliefs. This series of events tragically resulted in Tom losing the support of his entire family.

In July of 2013, I interviewed former Swedish LDS area authority 70 Hans Mattsson (<http://mormonstories.org/hans-mattsson/>), who spoke of his significant concerns regarding the way doubt/disbelief continued to be handled by the church. Hans’ story uncovered [significant troubles experienced by LDS church members in Sweden](#), and showed very clearly that the LDS church was/is deeply inept in its ability to support LDS church members struggling with their faith.

In October of 2013, Elder Dallin H. Oaks gave a general conference talk entitled “[No Other Gods](#)” that was deeply troubling to me. Having counseled as a mental health professional with dozens of young LGBT Mormons who were/are tormented over their inability to change their sexual orientation, I was deeply concerned that such

language from Elder Oaks and others would contribute to, and possibly accelerate the rash of suicides experienced by LDS LGBT members.

From that point forward, I decided that as a matter of conscience, I would need to begin speaking up more forcefully, to provide additional attention and context regarding LDS church teachings or policies that I believed to be harmful to its members. This was followed by my delivery of a [TEDx talk in public support of LGBT individuals and same-sex marriage](#), and [my public support of the Ordain Women movement](#).

In February of 2014, I was summoned by my bishop, Brian Hunt, and informed that he would be initiating yet another investigation into my efforts with Mormon Stories. He explicitly listed my work with Mormon Stories, my support of same-sex marriage, and my support of Ordain Women as primary causes of the investigation.

At that point my wife and I felt tired of feeling harassed by these ongoing investigations, and concluded that we would no longer cooperate with them. We did, however, continue to attend church with our children through June of 2014.

On June 7, 2014, I was contacted by letter by my current stake president, [Dr. Bryan King](#) (whom I had never met), and informed that he would be initiating a disciplinary council against me, with the intent of either disfellowshipping me from the church (i.e., putting me on probationary status), or excommunicating me.

At my request, Bryan King met with me to discuss my situation and concerns. This meeting occurred in late June of 2014. In early August of 2014, we met for a second time, wherein Bryan King verbally enumerated several specific terms for avoiding church discipline and remaining in good standing with the church. These terms included:

- 1) Censoring and removing all past episodes of Mormon Stories podcast that were not favorable and/or faith-promoting to the church.
- 2) Agreeing to never again interview anyone for Mormon Stories podcast who expressed doubt, disbelief, or criticism of the LDS church or its leaders.
- 3) To never again voice any public doubt or criticism of the LDS church or its leaders.
- 4) To cease my [public support of same-sex marriage](#), and of the [Ordain Women movement](#).

On August 10th my wife (Margi) and I responded in letter to Bryan King, letting him know very explicitly that we would not be able to agree to these terms, and requested a speedy resolution to the investigation.

Yesterday, January 14th 2015, my wife and I met with Dr. Bryan King and his two counselors. We were informed that a disciplinary council has been set for me for "January 25, 2015 at the North Logan Utah Stake Center, located 2750 North 800

East, North Logan, Utah beginning at 6 p.m.” At present, we plan to attend this disciplinary council, though the date and time are subject to change.

While I acknowledge that LDS church leaders are in a very difficult situation as they [attempt to retain membership during very difficult times](#), I consider it a matter of conscience to continue to advocate publicly for the many LDS LGBT members, feminists, and intellectuals who experience deep and continued marital/familial/social/spiritual/occupational/psychological distress as a result of the LDS church’s history, teachings, and policies. The past ten years of my life have been dedicated to providing support to these individuals, and while my family and I would prefer to be left alone by LDS church leadership at this point, I would much rather face excommunication than disavow my moral convictions.

Over the coming months and years I will be teaming with my wife (Margi) and others to provide additional information, comfort, and support to Mormons in transition. The goal will be to help provide information, community, resources, and support for those transitioning away from the current view of LDS orthodoxy and towards greater health and well-being – whether they remain in or leave the LDS church. For those interested in collaborating in this effort, check back at <http://mormonstransitions.org> in the coming weeks/months/years for additional information.

Sincerely,

John P. Dehlin
Mormon Stories Podcast
<http://mormonstories.org>