

Disciplinary Council  
Anchorage Alaska Stake  
11 October 2016

First, we would like to acknowledge the time you are taking to meet with us tonight. Most of us are very busy. Next, we want to address a misperception. The summons letter that was delivered to us last week states "It saddens me you want to have a church disciplinary council." To clarify, we did not request a disciplinary council. We were presented with the option of formally resigning our membership or participating in a disciplinary council. We felt formal resignation was premature for us, as will be explained later in this document, and you chose to move forward with the disciplinary council.

Although we do not condone the premise or rationale for this disciplinary council, we are willingly participating and have reasons to hope it will be beneficial for all of us. We understand, as it has been explained to us, that this council is not a conventional legal court with the typical presentation of a prosecution and defense. We also recognize the outcome of this council is all but a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, it is important for us to accurately and honestly represent our perspective. It is not our intention to preach to you nor will we elaborate on the doctrines and history of the church that we believe to be deleterious or dubious. We are not providing the many references that support our views during this meeting however we recognize that some of you may be interested in this information and we would be happy to provide it later if requested. Some of you may view our words, actions, and attitudes as being arrogant, prideful, or haughty. We request that you suspend such judgment until you have walked in our shoes. We are no more intelligent or inspired than any of you and we have never tried to imply that. We just hope you will listen with an open mind, while carefully considering the important distinctions between arrogance and confidence.

First, we would like the council to have a brief context of who we are and what our relationship with the church has been. This is important in light of a current narrative accepted by many church members, and propagated by church leadership, including the recent statement made by Dieter Uchtdorf during the General Women's Conference on September 24, 2016. In reference to losing faith in the church, he states "Those who are impatient, uncommitted, or careless may find faith to be elusive. Those who are easily discouraged or distracted may hardly experience it". Similarly, in the most recent General Conference Melvin Ballard stated: "For some, Christ's invitation to believe and remain continues to be hard--or difficult to accept". He then downplayed the rationale of many who are leaving the LDS church by suggesting their struggles hinge on not "understanding specific church policies or teachings, concerns about church history, imperfections in some members or church leaders, difficulty in living a religion that requires so much, or weariness in well-doing". He then asked the question "Where will you go?" implying that there are no paths to truth and happiness outside of full fellowship with the LDS church. Statements like this are manipulative and represent a gross misunderstanding of why many people are choosing to leave this church. Anyone who thinks we have left the church because of sin, laziness, misunderstanding, lack of commitment, offense, carelessness, or discouragement does not know us.

We were born into the church and raised by loving parents, dear friends, and a caring community. Many of our ancestors walked across the plains to the Salt Lake valley. Others were modern pioneers as they

chose to join the church in more recent generations. We grew up in the church as committed members, intent on enduring to the end so we may obtain what we believed to be the highest degree of celestial glory. We faithfully earned our Young Women's Medallion, Eagle Scout, and zealously promoted the church and its teachings with our friends and neighbors. We married in the temple, made what we perceived to be covenants with God, prayed, fasted, and paid tithing. We studied, pondered, and memorized scriptures and approved church material with commitment. We have had powerful and personal experiences that have confirmed, and continue to confirm, our belief in powers beyond ourselves and their role in our well-being. We have sought to improve upon our talents and provide meaningful service to our children, our employers, and our neighbors. Between the two of us we have three Bachelor degrees, three Master's degrees, and numerous certifications and professional affiliations. Our assignments and contributions to the church have not been insignificant: class presidents, seminary council, full-time missionary service, teachers, advisors, Young Womens President, Relief Society counselor, Branch President, stake youth conference directors, Elders Quorum President, Ward Mission Leader, choir members, piano player, Scoutmaster, bishopric counselor, trek Ma and Pa, countless camps and high adventures, and many, many others. In short, we were in it to win it. Again, we want to emphasize that we do not share these things to highlight ourselves, but rather to underscore our efforts and level of commitment to what we believed was God's only true church on the earth.

This is not to say we always understood or agreed with all of the policies, customs, and traditions of the church. However, our questions and concerns were easily dismissed with the oft repeated mantra that 'the church is perfect but the people are not'. As young adults we were aware of many of the documents and statements promoted by people that were labeled as "anti-Mormon". Such as: Institutional racism, sexism, polygamy, policies and doctrines swayed by political and societal pressures, polyandry, marginalization of homosexuals, cult-like behaviors accompanied by secret oaths made under duress, Group Think behaviors, corporatism, translation by staring into a hat with a seer stone instead of a urim and thumim, misappropriation of finances, various conflicting authoritative statements made by church leaders and Prophets, alteration of scriptures and temple ceremonies to fit the current narrative, lack of transparency, the Adam-God theory, blood atonement, vows of vengeance, the non-literal translation of the Book of Abraham, and many others. We familiarized ourselves with these viewpoints and then quickly discounted them with scriptures and statements from more orthodox sources while seeking to defend what we believed to be a more accurate representation of God's Kingdom. Our trusting acceptance of revisionist history was embarrassingly devout.

Through all of this, we had to acknowledge that most, if not all, of these claims about the church were based on publicly available historical and contemporary information. Some sources were more credible than others. Imagine our discontent when the recent essays available through LDS.org revealed that many of the claims that were previously labeled "anti-Mormon lies" were, in fact, accurate and are confirmed by church sources. These church-produced essays denounce and disavow doctrines that had previously been declared by Prophets, Seers, and Revelators as eternal and unchangeable. How were we to believe that the Prophet cannot lead us astray, when the official church history itself confirms that they already have? We began to clearly understand the folly of "trusting in the arm of flesh". The Church teaches that we should pray for God's guidance, seek counsel from church leaders, and that through the

spirit we may “know the truth of all things”. We were confident that such an approach would vindicate the church and its claims, as the only true and living church with God’s priesthood authority. After all, well-respected church leader J. Reuben Clark wrote “If we have truth, it cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not truth, it ought to be harmed”. We desperately wanted to validate the church and its teachings because it was such a foundational component of our lives and formed so much of our social network. We had heard the horror stories spoken over the pulpit of what happens when people leave the church and we found it difficult to imagine a meaningful and successful life without it.

With this context in mind, we began what was for us an unprecedented investigation into all aspects of our religion in a sincere attempt to validate its truthfulness. Over the past few years we have given literally thousands upon thousands of hours to studying, pondering, meditating, listening, praying, and considering the information that is available to all who are interested in finding it. We dove into the scriptures, conference talks, essays, articles, blogs, podcasts, discussions, forums, books, and even personal meetings with apostles and leaders from various derivations of Mormonism. We searched, pondered, and prayed with sincerity. In the spirit of legitimate research, we intentionally did not limit ourselves only to material that is approved by the LDS church and its correlation committee.

Finally, based on our desire to remain intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually honest, we had to concede that the claims to authority and some of the fundamental doctrines upheld by the LDS church are simply not true. We also believe anyone who chooses to genuinely walk this path would come to the same conclusions that we, and thousands of others, already have. Namely: That the church is not what it claims to be. It does not have any more right to divine approval and authority than many of the other denominations that make the exact same claim. And if at any point this was God’s one true church, it no longer is.

Sadly, many of the beautiful teachings that focus on love, kindness, forgiveness, personal inspiration, obedience to the laws of heaven, and freedom of choice have been supplanted by two overarching and all-encompassing doctrines: Namely, that the prophet will not and cannot lead the members astray and that dutiful obedience to the council of the man who presides over you is more important than following your conscience. Church members are often told to obey the counsel of their leaders, even if it is misguided, because they will receive blessings for their obedience. These two doctrines are promoted while ignoring or misapplying many of the revelations and scriptures this church claims to believe in. We have been asked to trust in the arm of flesh and just obey the council given, even if it is wrong.

In February 2016 we made the decision to step away from the LDS church and withhold any official support from what is legally chartered as “The Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”. We view this decision as an act of personal integrity. We carefully weighed the pros and cons of church attendance and realized that the scale tipped in favor of the cons for our family and many others. Very real and damaging consequences have come as a result of deleterious church practices and teachings and we no longer wish to deliberately expose ourselves to such things. Institutional racism, sexism, marginalization of the LGBT community, promotion of a rape culture, and emotional stunting are just a few examples.

We will not, and have not, made any attempt to privately push our views on anyone. The public forum, however, remains public. We reserve the same right as anyone to post our opinions. We will likely continue to publicly share some of our thoughts and opinions about church policies and practices--not because we are trying to embarrass the church or belittle the sincere beliefs of its members, but because we know we are helping many believing members who are struggling within this church and those who are dealing with the challenges of a faith transition. We sincerely believe our posts are doing more good than harm. Otherwise we would not post. Hundreds of people have already reached out privately to express their deepest gratitude and support for our willingness to be open and talk publicly about these issues because they cannot or choose not to be vocal themselves, often for very understandable reasons. These are real people who are isolated and suffering in silence because of the teachings and oppressive environment within the LDS church. Family relationships have been strengthened, depression has been alleviated, and people dealing with suicidal ideation have found renewed hope and community when they realize they are not alone because people like us have chosen to speak up, despite the consequences. We have talked with many people who are relieved to find someone in whom they can confide their deepest thoughts without fear of rebuttal, judgement, attempted correction, or disciplinary action.

The types of people who are leaving the institutional church should be noted. Many of these people have served in prominent positions within the church and are high caliber individuals and families. They, like us, have not taken this decision lightly. These people include Stake Presidents, Mission Presidents, Area Seventy, Relief Society Presidents, Bishops, and leaders of the church youth organizations. We are keenly aware of scriptural prophecies about a latter-day sifting of the wheat and the tares and that even the elect will be deceived. We should all remind ourselves that residence in some eternal glory is not for us to judge—and we are confident that any supposed reward in heaven has nothing to do with our institutional affiliation. Lasting power and authority is acquired by maintaining our honor and by doing our very best with the information and resources available. The Book of Mormon itself, regardless of its authenticity or not, states that even God would cease to be God without His honor. We hope you will not question our honor or authenticity in voicing our opinion about the church and its policies. Even the God promoted by the LDS church would not condemn us, because we know our hearts are pure. We fully acknowledge that we have much to learn, and so we will continue to do our best with the information we acquire.

We need to address the definition of what we have been accused of: Apostasy. The publicly accessible LDS church website defines apostasy as “when individuals, or groups of people turn away from the principles of the gospel”. The church approved Guide to the Scriptures defines it as “a turning away from the truth by individuals, the Church, or entire nations”. If these are the definitions by which we are accused, we unequivocally enter the plea of Not Guilty. We are not guilty of any sin or misdeed that would warrant such a label. We could, however, justifiably levy the charge of apostasy against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints using the very resources that this church claims to believe in. But that is not the purpose of this council.

Alternatively, the closely guarded Handbook of Instructions, Volume 1, provides five different definitions of apostasy, none of which make any mention of truth or the gospel of Jesus of Christ. Here are the definitions, accompanied by our plea, in reverse order:

5. Formally join another church and advocate its teachings. Not Guilty

4. Are in a same-gender marriage. Not Guilty

3. Continue to follow the teachings of apostate sects (such as those that advocate plural marriage) after being corrected by their bishop or a higher authority. Not Guilty

2. Persist in teaching as Church doctrine information that is not Church doctrine after they have been corrected by their bishop or a higher authority. Not Guilty

1. Repeatedly act in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the Church or its leaders. Perhaps. This accusation is questionable, but assuming that a handful of posts to our family and friends on FaceBook expressing some of our concerns with the direction of the church constitute repeated public opposition, we are Guilty as Charged. But this is a trumped-up charge. We have never claimed to turn our backs on the gospel of Jesus Christ and we have made every attempt to act with integrity in all that we do.

It should also be noted that posting our opinions about church policies, pointing out the lack of evidence by which to judge if the church is lead by prophets, and briefly mentioning our non-affiliation with the corporate LDS church in an obscure Facebook post places us in the same category, with the same consequences, as murderers, predators, and child molesters. Do you really believe this is a fair judgement?

We have been asked why we haven't just resigned. Some have even requested that we resign. It is true that we no longer consider ourselves members of the LDS church and we would eventually like our names removed from the rosters. But excommunicating people like us simply marginalizes us from certain family and community members and causes unnecessary pain to those who adhere to the doctrines of the LDS church, such as our parents. Similarly, voluntarily resigning our membership before our family and friends have had a chance to process our decision causes similar damage to these relationships. There is nothing about this proceeding that promotes family unity or wellness within the church. Rather than resign prematurely, we have agreed to participate in this disciplinary council to shed light on a process that we and many others believe should not occur under these circumstances.

It has been suggested that we should be excommunicated as an act of mercy--to prevent us from breaking our covenants.

First, we are not breaking any covenants that we believe to be legitimately divine.

Second, the temple covenants are made under circumstances of duress and coercion. The actual covenants are not explained in any detail before the ordinance, unlike the appropriately and specifically detailed explanations regarding the baptismal covenant. By simply showing up to participate in temple

ordinances an individual is essentially committing to the entire process. People are given less than 10 seconds to think about these covenants and their implications before accepting them. The only other option is to leave while under the watchful eyes of trusted endowed and committed parents and other respected adults filling the room. This method of imposing covenants upon people is manipulative and coercive. Any promises or covenants made under these circumstances are not eternally binding.

Third, by this logic should you not excommunicate every member of the church who has doubts about its authenticity? At least 10 million members do not have or want a current temple recommend. Many others are far more outspoken than us. Have disciplinary councils been convened or scheduled for all of them?

Rather, it seems like the primary purpose of this particular council is to “safeguard the purity and good name of the church” as per the handbook. You likely see us as a legitimate threat to the image of the LDS church. Ironically, the purity of the church you are trying to protect is easily brought into question when people like us are summoned for the most intense form of discipline the church can produce. Perhaps you believe the purpose of this council is to “protect the innocent”, but what many in church leadership fail to recognize is that WE are not the threat. Not once have we pushed our ideas on anyone or aspired to some agenda to damage the church. People like us are not suffering from a faith crisis so much as the church is suffering from a truth crisis. The church is sinking its own ship. We are just tossing out lifeboats.

The outpouring of communication we received from members all over the globe, due to a recent podcast interview with us on MormonStories, confirmed our understanding that thousands upon thousands of church members have had experiences similar to ours but are in agony because there is not a safe place within the orthodox LDS community to discuss their concerns and questions. Daughters are not talking to mothers, fathers are not talking to their sons, and spouses are not talking with each other about the most important issues on their mind because they fear the social implications of being labeled as a doubter, or even worse, an apostate. This presents them with three choices: quietly remain in the church, quietly leave the church, or voice their concerns under threat of disciplinary council. We will not break confidences, but we will tell you that there are many active members in this stake, and thousands elsewhere, who share our views silently. They do, however, come to us with their concerns. Ironically, they have found the most comfort, love, and support by the very people the church is labeling as apostate.

In the podcast we made the statement that other friends and organizations had our back more than the church ever did. This deserves some clarification. What we were trying to say, in the most gentle way we could, is that other people and other organizations helped us more during our transition period than the church did. This is specific to the past couple of years. Prior to that the church, and our friends within the church, have always been very supportive. It is accurate to state that the church structure and many of our friends that are in the church did not provide the support we needed as we were weighing the most difficult and significant experience of our lives. Attempts to fix, change, accuse, or censor us were not helpful. All we needed was an understanding and sympathetic ear. That said, we understand that many people in the church would have "had our back" during this difficult time, but their pain was very

real and this made healthy relationships difficult. This is largely due to the belief that our shared experiences occurred solely because of the church (as opposed to *through* the church). So when we step away from the church some interpret it as a personal rejection. We recognize that would be a very painful message if that is how it is received, but that was never our intent. We have no desire to close any doors on any relationships and we are not offended or upset by anyone.

Again, please understand that we deeply value our friendships within the church. Past experiences, relationships, campouts, float trips, hikes, talks, memories, and spiritual experiences are all remembered. Of course we didn't forget them, nor are we trying to conveniently diminish them so we can justify our current narrative. On the contrary. We have carefully considered them and are simply applying them to a different framework. That said, we believe it is not productive to try to convince someone of anything based on personal feelings, promptings, or impressions. These things cannot be quantified or debated. They are open to different and equally valid interpretations. Testifying of these spiritually validating experiences is useful as an expression of belief, but they are not a useful tool when discussing facts.

The beliefs of our friends within the church are just as valid as our beliefs. Realize, however, that if our personal integrity is brought into question we will defend ourselves. We have often wondered why some people feel justified in personally labeling or accusing individuals like us who leave the church but it is somehow not ok for us to ask general questions or express our beliefs about the organization. Which approach causes the most harm to relationships? We have chosen to investigate our questions about the church with the same intellectual and spiritual zeal that we gave to being members of the church. After weighing the evidence available, we found that the truth claims simply do not hold up. Other than that, we are the same people and consider ourselves just as perceptive, understanding, and well-intended as we have always been. We are clearly not any more intelligent than people who choose to stay in the church. That said, not everyone has studied the same material or had the same experiences as we have. And we haven't had the same experiences as others. It is ok for intelligent people to have different views. Sadly, when people wrap their identity and their relationships so closely to the LDS church they often view it as a personal affront when someone they love no longer goes to church. Please understand that what we are doing is not a personal attack against any of you. We love you. We have hiked, camped, cried, prayed, laughed, sang and been with you in many meaningful and important ways. None of that is lost on this decision. We will gladly continue to embrace your friendship on the streets, in the stores, in the mountains, and in our home.

We are grateful for the growth and experiences we have acquired during our membership with the LDS church, but recognize these experiences occurred through the church—not because of it. This is an important distinction. We are blessed with many good friends who love and support us regardless of church affiliation and we look forward to continuing a productive life. We have much to learn as we work within the global community to promote peace and prosperity.

So why are we being brought before a disciplinary council when others are not? Many members are no longer active participants in the LDS church. In fact, the vast majority of members on the rosters no longer wish to affiliate. Some of these people quietly slip away, some resign their membership, others

choose to remain vocal about the church for years. But most are never brought before a disciplinary council. If we are accused as apostates and excommunicated you should carefully consider the implications. It will likely be much more difficult for the church than it will be for us. You need to understand that by doing this to us, you are sending a clear message that honest investigators of truth should not voice their concerns, publicly or privately, because somebody might rat them out. Instead, they are encouraged to silently and obediently adhere to the counsel of an authoritarian hierarchy. Some are uncomfortable when we compare the 15 million members of the church to the 25 million people of North Korea, but there are many strong parallels that should be considered.

We acknowledge that you probably feel pain and sorrow and likely attribute these feelings to our choices. We believe that the teachings of the LDS church, and other churches like it, have conditioned people to feel this way. In contrast, you should believe us when we say we are sincerely happy with our chosen path. We have found it to be immensely beneficial. It is true that we have had to process feelings of betrayal and disappointment, but we are not angry or living lives of bitterness. Our lives are not perfect because we left the church, nor do we expect them to be, but it is fair to say we are thriving more now than ever. There is much joy and love in our lives.

There are many who reside within the boundaries of the Anchorage Stake who are part of a healthy and thriving post-Mormon/transitioning-Mormon support network. Here is a message from one of them:

“Dear Friends, I think we are more alike than different. We all seek to live our lives purposefully and with integrity. Hopefully, we are always willing to change for the better when truth presents itself. If ever any of you need to talk, I am available. I leave you with hope that; we may all be happy, we may all be healthy, we may all be safe, & our lives unfold with ease and contentment.

Peace, Joy & Love”

You are about to deliberate on the outcome of this council and decide, as you suppose, what will be our future fate within the church and perhaps the eternities. We understand this may feel like a very difficult and solemn matter. You have every legal right to do what you believe is necessary in regards to our membership status with the LDS church. However, we want you to understand very clearly that you do not have any moral authority over our lives, nor can you take away anything that is real regarding our relationship with God, our commitment to truth, or our future progression. You might think you do. You might even think you know you do. But you don't. That said, we look forward to seeing you again. In fact, we would love to meet up in a more congenial atmosphere for a friendly debrief. The first round is on us.

We give you our love and wish you the best,

Jacob, Amy, Jessica, and Benjamin Malouf

\*note\* This statement was co-drafted by both of us, Amy and Jacob Malouf. Our children, Jessica and Benjamin, also independently expressed their desire to have their names attached with this document.