

AnnotatedBoM
Street Address
City, ST ZIPCode

Month Day, Year

Bishop _____
Street Address
City, ST ZIPCode

Dear Bishop _____,

This letter is my formal notice that effective immediately any and all ecclesiastical leaders of the LDS Church and anyone else acting for and on behalf of the Church may not conduct interviews with my minor children without either my wife or me accompanying the child, in the room, during the interview. This is effective even if one of my minor children agrees to be interviewed without my wife or me present.

In addition, any and all ecclesiastical leaders of the LDS Church and anyone else acting for and in behalf of the Church may not discuss any matter of a sexual nature with my minor children during interviews or at any other time in any one-on-one conversation with my minor children (even if that one-on-one conversation takes place in a public area with others present). This is effective even if one of my minor children agrees to discuss a matter of a sexual nature.

Matters of a sexual nature include, but are not limited to:

- Sex
- Oral sex
- Law of chastity
- Masturbation
- Petting
- Pornography
- Sexual thoughts (or so-called “impure” thoughts)
- Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transsexual, Queer (LGBTQ) issues
- Same-sex marriage

If anyone representing the Church wants to speak with my minor child about a subject but is not sure as to whether I consider it a matter of a sexual nature, he or she must ask me before bringing up the subject in front of my child.

If any of these instructions are ambiguous, please send me your questions in writing. I'll respond in writing to document my expectations in this matter.

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I want to reiterate what I expressed by email, that I have no concerns about inappropriate intentions of you or any other individual in the Church. My concerns are about the process of youth interviews in the Church and some of the teachings of the Church. I appreciate your previously expressed desire to support me as a parent and follow my wishes regarding ecclesiastical interviews and discussions with my children. I think you are a great person. The Church is fortunate to have a man as good as you serving as bishop.

Thank you,

AnnotatedBoM

cc: Stake President
Street Address
City, ST ZIPCode

***** Email from A-BoM to Bishop *****

To Bishop _____
CC Wife of A-BoM StatePres Date and time sent
Bishop _____,

Thank you for your considerate reply. Since you hadn't replied quickly, I assumed you were taking the time to address this in the best way possible. I think we agree that it would be a formidable burden to provide a convincing case I would accept regarding these youth interviews. I understand something of why the Saints find the practice of a grown man interviewing a minor, alone, behind a closed door appropriate. I was in a bishopric many moons ago, so I actually did some of these youth interviews myself. Yet I'm certain I could not make a case for these interviews acceptable to a reasonable adult other than one who presupposes LDS authority claims and metaphysical claims are true.

I'm glad that your experiences interviewing members of the ward has been good. As a scientist, I'm sure that you'll appreciate the fact that personal anecdote regarding these interviews, relying heavily on personal reporting from those interviewed, in a social structure where those interviewed are taught practically from infancy to defer to priesthood authority, provides me no confidence in the practice of an adult interviewing a minor behind a closed door.

Because I find many of the teachings and doctrines of the Church harmful, and because I find these interviews as practiced by the Church risky and unjustified by evidence; LDS Church leaders (or anyone acting on behalf of the Church) may not interview my minor children without my presence. I'm glad this seems to align with your idea that a parent is always welcome in a youth interview.

I'll be drafting a letter to formalize the specifics of my expectations regarding these interviews to stress how seriously I take this and to try to avoid problems like the bad situation I put you in by shutting down a topic of discussion during an interview.

You're a good man. I admire you for many things. Know that my stand on this has nothing to do with you personally.

My best,

A-BoM

***** Email from Bish to A-BoM *****

On Day of Week, Month Day, Year Time Bishop _____ wrote:

Dear A-BoM,

I appreciate your sincere desires to be a good father, and I appreciate the support you give your wife. Although I know the faith difference is difficult, you both seem to be making it work.

I appreciate your feelings about the general issue you raised in your email. I have not responded sooner because of the time and consideration I have given it. Making a convincing case for the general issue that will be acceptable to you is a burden I don't think I can adopt. Given the many people in the ward, including the youth, that I am serving, I just don't have room for it. Please don't think less of me.

However, I wish to share with you a bit of my experiences that may allay your specific concerns in our ward. I have had so many precious experiences as bishop as both adults and youth have unloaded burdens in the Bishop's office. Without exception, the youth that volunteered law of chastity mistakes, as well as others, have become more confident. They feel more secure as a result. They find their own strength to keep themselves safe, to avoid influences that they have learned will make them unhappy.

I often ask them what they have learned from their experience. The thing that I hear that gives me hope our society's future is that they say they have become less judgemental of others. How beautiful.

Whenever a youth tells me something in confidence, usually things of a sexual matter, I always ask if they have talked to the parents about it. If they have not, I encourage them to do so. I explain to them how much their parents can help them and encourage them. I give gentle but passionate assurances that their parents will react better than they anticipate. Indeed, this has been the case without exception. Not every youth has talked to their parents, or accepted my offer to talk to their parents for them (which I've also done with the youth's permission), but those that have opened up to their parents tell me how good it has been to have their parents' support. The parents too have pulled me aside to tell me how positive it was for their child, both to have my encouragement and to have the issue open between youth and parents.

Talking with other bishops in our bishop's council every month, I think my experience is pretty typical.

In thinking about your email, I reread the 2002 talk of Elder Ballard's, Greatest Generation of Missionaries. It captures my thoughts and feelings. Like Elder Ballard, I want the *parents* to be the primary caretakers of their children's spiritual strength and sexual virtue. I want only to help the parents. A parent is always welcome in a youth interview. I usually invite the parent when they come together, or at least ask the youth if they want to have their parent come in or if they want to meet just with me.

Thank you for your understanding. All the best,

-Bishop _____

***** Email from A-BoM to Bishop *****

On Day of Week, Month, Year at Time, A-BoM wrote:

Bishop _____,

I want to apologize for putting you on the spot during Child of A-BoM's interview Sunday. I knew it was likely that questions about things dealing with sex would come up, but didn't think about taking a minute or two with you alone before Child of A-BoM's interview to discuss my concerns. So, I'm sorry for setting you up for an uncomfortable situation by interrupting the interview to stop the discussion about pornography or anything to do with sex.

You now know that I have concerns about local LDS church leaders interviewing children alone, one-on-one, in a room behind a closed door, but maybe I'm missing something, so I hope you can help me understand why you think this is an appropriate practice.

Below are some questions that I hope you will answer to explain why I should allow my minor children to be interviewed like this. Please feel free to talk about these questions with anyone who might help you consider responses.

Rest assured that my concerns are not about your character or integrity or the character or integrity of any specific person. I admire you as a good man and outstanding member of our community. My concern is about the nature and circumstances of LDS interviews of minors as a practice and associated risks.

I hope you can understand why these questions are of critical importance to me as a father. I consider my parental responsibilities sacred especially when it comes to protecting my children from potential harm. As such, I hope you'll weigh any discomfort you may experience with these questions against the discomfort I experience having a grown man talk to my child alone behind a closed door.

1. I understand that criminal background checks are still not done on LDS leaders who conduct one-on-one interviews with children. Is this correct?
2. Some probably think that the gift of discernment would ensure that only those who would be safe around children would be called to a position of trust. But let's consider what the case of George P. Lee can teach us about the gift of discernment. George P. Lee was ordained a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy in 1975. In 1994 he was convicted of molesting a girl multiple times during the last three years of his tenure as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. The victim was nine years old when the molestations began in 1986. (For more on Elder Lee's crimes, go to <http://archive.sltrib.com/printfriendly.php?id=6504464&itype=ngpsid>.) In addition to this, there are local LDS leaders convicted of similar crimes against minors. Though the number of local LDS leaders who molest their minor ward members is probably low, even one such case is one too many. Cases like this demonstrate that discernment fails to prevent perpetrators from being called to leadership positions of trust and exploiting that trust to harm children. In light of these facts, is there any reason I should think that the gift of discernment is of any value in protecting my children?
3. LDS ecclesiastic leaders do not receive adequate (if any) training from the Church in psychology, human development, or counseling of children or adolescents. What qualifies these men to interview minors alone in a room, behind closed doors, especially as it pertains to any discussion about sexuality?

4. If your answer to the previous question is the authority of the priesthood, mantle of the office, whisperings of the Spirit, or some other metaphysical property or process, consider this. Presumably if anyone should have the metaphysical tools to say the right thing, it would be the President of the LDS Church. However, these presidents have said some remarkably damaging things in their role as President. For example, speaking about blacks, Brigham Young said, "Cain might have been killed, and that would have put a termination to that line of human beings. This was not to be, and the Lord put a mark upon him, which is the flat nose and black skin." (Journal of Discourses, vol. 7, p. 290, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/9603/rec/7>). Another example comes from President John Taylor who said, "And why did it [the curse of Cain] pass through the flood? Because it was necessary that the devil should have a representation upon the earth." (Journal of Discourses, vol. 22, p. 304 as found 6/25/2015 at <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/9616/rec/22>). If the President of the Church, acting in the capacity of his presidency, can say such hurtful and damaging things, is there any reason I should believe there are metaphysical properties or processes in place that would prevent a local leader from giving harmful counsel or damaging commentary to my children?

5. The LDS Church trains its members that, "sexual sins are more serious than any other sins except murder or denying the Holy Ghost" ("Sexual Purity Blesses Our Lives", Ensign, July 2010, p. 10). If you read this article, you'll notice all sexual sins are categorized as more serious than any sin but murder; a fleeting impure sexual thought is grouped with masturbation which is grouped with adultery which is grouped with rape as being next to murder. Many prophets have taught that "Your virtue is worth more than your life. Please, young folk, preserve your virtue even if you lose your lives" (Spencer W. Kimball quoting President David O. McKay, Miracle of Forgiveness, p. 63). There are quotes from these leaders saying it would be better for a child to die than to lose their virtue. I know of no official retraction of these irresponsible teachings. In light of these un-denounced teachings, why should I allow my child to be interviewed alone by an adult who is likely to be influenced by such teachings either directly or through the lingering culture about sexuality created in the Church by such teachings?

6. Utah public school teachers are not allowed to speak with children one-on-one about sexuality. In fact they are even required to get parental permission for each child to be included in group discussions about maturation. As far as I can tell, in most other churches (even those with well-trained clergy), individual ecclesiastic leaders do not interview youth about sex alone behind a closed door because they find it inappropriate. Is there any other situation you can think of where it is considered appropriate for an unqualified and untrained adult individual to ask children questions about sexual thoughts and behavior alone and behind a closed door?

7. Is there any reason you can give me to think it appropriate that a grown man, more than twice the age of my children, should be alone with one of my children, behind a closed door, discussing anything, let alone asking my child about sexual thoughts or sexual behavior?

I appreciate your careful consideration of these questions. I would be happy to discuss your responses to these questions with you in person, or to receive your responses in writing.

Sincerely,

A-BoM