

Gay LDS urge church not to fight ruling

California will allow same-sex marriages beginning June 17

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A support group for gay Mormons urged church leaders Wednesday to stay on the sidelines after the California Supreme Court said same-sex marriage there is legal.

The church, which teaches that gay sex is a sin, has expressed disappointment in the recent ruling. Some critics and conservative groups want to overturn it through a constitutional amendment.

In a statement Wednesday, the executive director of Affirmation said he hopes church leaders would not "use their energies and their funds" to overturn a ruling that affirms the worth of families or meddle in politics that demonizes gays.

"Rather work with us to counsel and assist individuals and families who have been devastated by the church's teachings that have caused family members to reject their children who are gay," Olin Thomas wrote.

"We encourage LDS leaders to find a new focus by preaching and living a Gospel of love and respect toward all peoples and all families," he said of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

California, meanwhile, issued a directive Wednesday that said same-sex couples will be able to wed in the state beginning June 17.

The state said it chose June 17 because the state Supreme Court has until the day before to decide whether to grant a stay of its May 15 ruling legalizing gay marriage.

Gay-rights advocates and some clerks initially thought couples would be able to wed as early as June 14. The court's decisions typically take effect 30 days after they are made.

The guidelines from Janet McKee, chief of California's office of vital records, to the state's 58 county clerks also contained copies of new marriage forms that include lines for "Party A" and "Party B" instead of bride and groom. The gender-neutral nomenclature was developed in consultation with county clerks, according to the letter.

Thomas said the California ruling doesn't affect LDS Church doctrine or the sacred ceremonies conducted in Latter-day Saint temples, which bind couples for eternity.

"This is about civil marriage as an institution of the state a legal institution based on core societal values, such as

the worth and dignity of the family unit," Thomas said. "Religions are not being asked to marry anyone they don't want to marry."

Kim Farah, a spokeswoman for the 13-million member denomination, said church leaders had no comment Wednesday.

The Salt Lake City-based church was part of a coalition, including Roman Catholics, evangelicals and Orthodox Jews, which filed court papers in the California case asking the high court to uphold a ban on gay marriage.

Church members believe God only sanctions marriage between a man and a woman and tout the traditional family as the basic unit of society. Gays are welcomed as church members and can hold church roles, but only if they remain celibate.

Some who have acted on what the church calls "same-gender attraction" have been excommunicated.

Formed by students at church-owned Brigham Young University in the late 1970s, Affirmation has more than 2,000 gay, lesbian and transgender members. It is not sanctioned by the church and until recently was not even acknowledged by leaders.

In its May 15 statement, the church said it recognizes "that same-sex marriage can be an emotional and divisive issue" and called the court's ruling "unfortunate."

It's unclear whether the church will play a role in trying to place a constitutional amendment on California's fall ballot. But Mormons have a history of fighting gay marriage initiatives nationwide.

In 2000, the church actively supported Proposition 22, a ballot measure that prohibited California from legally recognizing gay marriages performed outside the state.

In a letter read from the pulpit, the 740,000 members in California were urged to give time and money to get the measure passed. It was approved but struck down by the recent court ruling.

In February, Affirmation leaders invited new church President Thomas S. Monson to open a discussion about issues important to gay Mormons and their families.

A meeting with LDS Family Services Commissioner Fred C. Riley is scheduled for Aug. 11, said Dave Melson, Affirmation's assistant executive director.