

## Gay Mormons Seek Meeting With New Leader

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SALT LAKE CITY -- A group of gay Mormons is seeking an unprecedented meeting with the new church president and his counselors, hoping to begin a conversation and find ways to address the concerns of its members.

Affirmation, with more than 2,000 gay, lesbian and transgender members, is not recognized by the church, which at one time labeled homosexuality as a problem that required help.

"Although there are many areas of hurt and disagreement that have separated us, there are many more areas on which we can find agreement, and in doing so, become a blessing in the lives of many of the Saints, both straight and gay," the group wrote in its invitation to Thomas S. Monson last week.

Monson assumed leadership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints last Sunday following the death of its previous president, Gordon B. Hinckley.

Such a meeting with Monson and his counselors \_ a triumvirate known as the First Presidency \_ would be unprecedented, said David W. Melson, the group's assistant executive director.

"This was something we've talked about for a while," Melson said. "With the death of President Hinckley and the installation of new church leadership, it seemed like the appropriate time."

Church teachings consider homosexuality a sin and hold up traditional marriage as an institution ordained by God.

In the 1990s, the church was active politically in fighting same-sex marriage legislation nationwide. A church official signed a 2006 letter from religious groups asking Congress for a marriage amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Some gays were rejected by their families and excommunicated by the church. Some were counseled that marriage or intensive therapy programs would "cure" their homosexuality.

More recently, church leaders have softened their position, drawing a distinction between the feelings or inclinations of same-gender attraction, as they call it, and actions.

Hinckley, who died Jan. 27 at age 97, had called on the church to reach out to gay members with compassion and love.

Melson said a new approach could prevent Mormon parents from kicking their gay children out of their homes and reduce the number of suicides among young gay men.

"I would like for us never again to have gay individuals, particularly our young people, being told that they are not welcome in the church they grew up in," he said, whose group was founded in 1977 by closeted gay students at the church-owned Brigham Young University.

Church spokeswoman Kim Farah could not confirm receipt of the group's letter on Friday.

"Any correspondence with the First Presidency is private," she said.