

others who obeyed Church teachings and married within the Church.

I was serving as membership clerk in my Chicago ward when Wendy and I were married, and I was curious about the statistical group I had just joined, the “part-member family.” I’m sure my ward is not representative in any way, but a full third of the families at that time included a nonmember spouse. Some of these were “problem” families who never attended church and were difficult to home teach. But others were solid members of the ward. I also became aware of many couples I assumed were stalwart, dyed-in-the-wool, pioneer-stock Mormons, one or both of whom were, in fact, converts of some years. They sympathized with my stories of non-Mormon in-laws, and many of their experiences were similar to my own.

People who have been raised in the Church will and should continue to seek out and marry those who share their religious and cultural background. As more Latter-day Saints live throughout the country and world, we should not be surprised if some of them find plenty in common with their non-Mormon neighbors, sometimes enough to marry them. This may provide a challenge to Church leaders, and to a theology that emphasizes group solidarity. However it may also provide some strengths, in linking the Church to the larger community and in providing ways to understand the people around us who don’t choose to be Latter-day Saints.

## Same Religion, Different Churches

*Carrie A. Miles*

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN how to have a successful interfaith marriage, I have to start by telling you as a social psychologist that I don’t recommend marrying outside your faith. Although I have been happily married for twelve years to a non-Mormon, social survey data show that people who marry spouses of another faith are more likely to divorce and are less likely to be active participants in either church. Further, those who marry within their own faith are more religious than they would be if they had not married. If my husband Larry and I had not been able to find a common ground to bridge our faiths, to find a

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common religion, we would not have married each other. We were both very serious about that.

I grew up in southern California. My family on my mother's side crossed the plains during pioneer times and settled in a small Utah town. My father is not a member of any church. Although Mom took us to Sunday School and Primary, religion was something we didn't talk much about in our house. I didn't like the tension around the issue, and I resolved not to perpetuate it in my own family. When our Primary teacher told our class the odds were that half of us would marry out of the Church, I swore I would not be in that half. I was very active in the Church, and I went to college at BYU.

After receiving my bachelor's degree, I entered graduate school at the University of Chicago. I signed up for university housing and ended up living in an old hotel that had been turned into a dorm. The University of Chicago is in Hyde Park on the south side of Chicago (what the Jim Croce song calls "the baddest part of town"). Dorm residents had to have a key to even get into the lobby. Our rooms were all private, with our own bathrooms and alcoves in the walls where old Murphy beds had once been. Downstairs was a huge communal kitchen with dozens of tiny refrigerators and multiple sinks and stoves. Most of the residents were first-year graduate students, and everyone was very friendly. I arrived on a Monday and met Larry on Tuesday. As fellow refugees from the West Coast marooned in the Midwest, we quickly became good friends. Because the communal kitchen wasn't immediately ready, we all ate out together for the first few days. Larry became my refuge from a couple of fellows in the dorm whose interest in me I didn't want to encourage. But because Larry was a friend, I didn't worry about encouraging him.

Early in our relationship Larry noticed the "Mormon" books in my bookcase. When I asked him about his religion, he at first said he was a Jesus freak, then softened that to a "generic" Christian. I learned he participated in a small religious movement descended from Adventist movements in the "burned over" district in western New York. He, his father, and his grandfather had all been leaders in this lay church that calls itself the Berean Bible Students. It claims to be exclusively true and encourages members to isolate themselves religiously from other groups. While Larry has been extremely involved in the leadership of this group at various times, he ignored its claims of exclusivity and really did consider himself a generic Christian. He strongly believes certain things about the nature of God and the world, yet he remains open-minded and nonjudgmental.

When I was in high school, I had shared the gospel with my friends,

and in fact, one had joined the Church. There hadn't exactly been anyone to preach to at BYU, so I was a little out of practice, but now I found myself in Chicago with this very nice fellow who was interested in religion. As our relationship progressed, I started working on him. To my surprise, he not only accepted a Book of Mormon, he actually *read* it. That was a shock, because we all know quite a few card-carrying members who have never read the Book of Mormon. Despite his willingness to read the book, however, he just couldn't believe it. We talked a lot about religion, and we agreed on some things. His church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were both established in the same area of New York and hold many beliefs in common that separate them from mainstream Protestants. Their common tenets include leadership by a lay clergy, the concept that Jesus Christ is the son of God and a separate individual from God the Father, baptism by immersion, and prohibition of smoking and (at least among the non-Italian congregations) drinking. But although Larry was curious and open-minded, he just didn't believe Mormonism. It is too divergent from the Bible-based Christian beliefs he held, and negative experiences within his own religious tradition led him to particularly object to the claims of exclusive truth.

In the meantime, our relationship had grown more serious. Larry lived around the corner from me in the dorm, and we cooked together with a group of other students, studied together, and spent a lot of our free time together. However, we were both very concerned about the differences in our religious philosophies, and neither of us wanted to get more involved in a relationship that was doomed because of our differences. My ambivalence is best illustrated by a dream I had. In my dream, Larry and I were married in the ward building where I grew up. After the ceremony, however, the mass of people leaving the chapel carried me off in one direction and him in another. You can interpret that for yourself.

Finally, in the early spring, we decided not to see each other anymore, and I began dating a member in my branch. But Larry and I were miserable apart, and by summer we were once again involved with each other. I was convinced that two reasonable people who loved each other could find a way of working out their differences. Hadn't I been taught that if a person is honest and investigates the Church, he or she will become convinced of its truthfulness? Larry was one of the most honest people I knew, so I was sure he would eventually accept the Church as true.

Later that summer I went to one of Larry's church camps with him. Larry's father had started these camps when Larry was young. This par-

ticular camp was a family camp, and people of all ages were there participating in Bible studies, singing Christian camp songs, and having testimony meetings. As the week went on, I was jarred to realize that the Holy Ghost was working at that camp. I felt it at those testimony meetings as much as I had ever felt it at Mormon testimony meetings (and I mean the really good ones). This was a devastating revelation for me. I had gone through my entire Mormon experience believing in the "one true Church." I wasn't prepared to find the Holy Ghost in a congregation of people who sang Bill Gaither hymns (if you have never heard one, think "saccharine" and you'll get the effect). The experience shook my world view. My perceptions of myself, the world, and my future were all tied up in the central authority of the "one true Church."

It was difficult for me to sort out my feelings, and it took time, but slowly my view of religion began to change to accommodate this experience. I found I no longer cared about any particular doctrine. My faith in Christ was intact, strengthened, in fact; but I no longer had faith in my own ability to discern exclusive truths. Ultimately I decided to follow the example of Paul, who said he was "determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

A friend from the Hyde Park branch once told me that Larry and I had the same religion, we just belonged to different churches. I think she was right. Larry never had been sectarian, and after the camp experience I eventually became less so. Larry did not convert me to his religion. I still love and respect the Mormon church. I have just joined a wider circle of faith that allows me fellowship with "generic Christians" as well as with Latter-day Saints.

When we were in Hyde Park, we were still involved in the Church and our friends there, but I haven't been to an LDS service since we left Chicago seven years ago. This is in the main because, although we are happy associating with Latter-day Saints, they don't quite know what to do with us. Most don't know what to think about Larry any more than I did when I first met him. After all, here is this very nice fellow with high moral standards, who knows the Bible backward and forward, who probably knows the LDS scriptures and history better than they do, and who doesn't even drink *coffee*. But he still persists in saying, "Thanks, but no thanks" to the Church. So we just don't go. Although we haven't formally joined any other church, our family does attend services with a congregation of Christians.

I would like to emphasize a few points. First, religiously homogeneous marriages are preferable. If religion matters to you, life is much more pleasant if your spouse believes the same things you do. And remember that although you might think religion doesn't matter to one

of you when you begin a marriage, it may begin to matter a great deal when children enter the picture. I have several friends with mature marriages and immature offspring who are dealing with this issue now.

Second, it probably won't help to become more ecumenical if your potential spouse does not. Moving from a sectarian perspective into a larger world of belief and fellowship is not the same as asking that one of you leave his or her preferred religion to embrace the other's. I think that is much harder. I don't think I could have done that.

And finally, despite our early struggle, I believe God has led me to where I am now in this life. I am very happy, especially with my husband and family. If God led me here, I have to trust him to take care of us in the next world, too. Besides, there is a lot to be said for being married to a charming fellow who empties the dishwasher before he goes to work in the morning and who believes that equal treatment of the sexes is a religious imperative. If *Mother* in Heaven has any say in handing out the eternal rewards, I'm sure that Larry will do very well indeed.

