

# LDS WOMEN'S AUTHORITY AND THE TEMPLE: A FEMINIST FHE<sup>1</sup> DISCUSSION WITH MAXINE HANKS

Provo, Utah, February 25, 2019  
(excerpted and edited for length and clarity)

*Editor's note: The following is taken from a Q&A discussion that followed a presentation on "LDS Women and the Temple in Historical Context." The text of the presentation will appear on the Dialogue website.*

DIALOGUE: It's a rare pleasure to get together with Maxine Hanks for a private discussion about the place of women in the LDS Church. She has done research and writing in Mormon studies for a long time, and she's been standing on the front lines of Mormon feminism for more than three decades. I know you all—as Mormon feminists—have questions for her about feminist issues in the Church, and her thoughts about the temple. I also asked her to share some of her personal journey with us.

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1. Feminist FHE (Family Home Evening), first organized in Provo, Utah in 2012, by Hannah Wheelwright, and restarted in 2017 by Tinesha Zandamela, is a group of young Mormon Feminists that meets and talks about the intersections between Mormonism and Feminism. Since its founding, the group has spread to other locations. Current Feminist FHE (Provo) organizers include Laurie Batschi, Halli Bowman, Sydney Bright, Mallory Matheson, Jenna Rakuita, Rebecca Russavage, Charlotte Schultz, and Olivia Whiteley.

MAXINE: Thanks, I'm happy to answer any questions or discuss whatever topics you have in mind. First, to give some background, in 1992 I published a book about the history of Mormon feminism and women's relationship to priesthood and theology.<sup>2</sup> I found feminist voices from the beginnings of the Church to the present; women like Emma Hale Smith, Eliza R. Snow, and Emmeline B. Wells were talking about their own authority independent of men's, and their own relationship to priesthood. I used women's writings from the *Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes*, the *Woman's Exponent*, *Exponent II*, *Relief Society Magazine*, *Mormons for ERA*, *Algie Ballif Forum*, *Mormon Women's Forum*, *Voice club at BYU*, and other sources. I republished a few feminist articles and asked feminist scholars to write new articles about LDS women's history and theology for the book. I also interviewed women and men to collect their experiences with the divine feminine.

So, it was a lot of new and bold feminist research in one book at a time when most Mormons didn't even use the word "feminist" in public. The result was that five of my writers and myself faced Church discipline; four of us were in the September Six.<sup>3</sup> We lost our Church membership, but we knew that was the risk and the price for publishing feminist work that questioned traditional or institutional views at that time.

Today all that information is mainstream on the internet, often used or cited by LDS historians, scholars, and members. So, nineteen years later, I came back to the Church in 2012. I felt compelled to do

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2. Maxine Hanks, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), available at <http://signaturebookslibrary.org/840/>.

3. Contributors to the book who were excommunicated: Maxine Hanks, Michael Quinn, Lavina F. Anderson in 1993; Janice M. Allred in 1995 and Margaret M. Toscano in 2000; Lynne K. Whitesides was disfellowshipped in 1993. The September Six were six scholars and feminists all disciplined in 1993.

that for my own healing, as a feminist historian and theologian in the Church. I wanted to foster belonging for myself and others who've been silenced or disciplined for feminism or scholarly work.

I didn't recant anything I'd said or written in the past or change my feminist views or work. I simply wanted to restore my membership, as I am. Obviously, I had help from supportive Church leaders. It was one of the best decisions of my life. This week is the seventh anniversary of my rebaptism. It's been extremely healing and allowed me to explore a new territory of faith and ministry.

In the 1990s, we were navigating new territory by publishing Mormon feminist history and theology. We were talking about women's relationship to priesthood in public; yet we couldn't do that without danger of Church discipline then. Today it's commonplace to talk about women's priesthood and theology in public; everyone is doing it. I'm not saying it's entirely safe, and some feminists still encounter leaders who try to silence or discipline them. Yet Mormon feminism is now understood as inherent in our history and culture. It's normal, mainstream.

Now, I find myself sharing women's history and theology in Church as a temple-going member because we realize that women's theology has been there the whole time, embedded in Mormon origins. You can read it in the original Relief Society Minutes and other historic feminist writings on the Church web site. Today, members want more information about women's history and theology. My ward asked me to share research about women's relationship to priesthood. I see tremendous positive change and hunger for women's theology. I anticipate more feminist work and healing in the Church to come. I've seen major changes in my lifetime. I know that policy can shift dramatically.

For example, when I was young, I wanted to be a missionary, but women were told not to apply, so I had to push and wait for approval to submit my application in June 1978. A few days later, the Church

announced a revelation extending priesthood to black members. It was so sudden, so huge, it blew our minds and changed the Church overnight. I remember wondering if women might someday get the priesthood too. I entered the missionary home in Salt Lake just before October General Conference in 1978, where I voted with thousands of members to accept priesthood ordination for black men and extend all priesthood and temple blessings to black women.

That same week I first received my endowment in the Salt Lake temple, before leaving to serve a mission in the South where I worked in black neighborhoods. So the Church voted to lift the priesthood ban against blacks one week before I went to teach in black homes. My first experience on arrival in the mission was the baptism of a black woman. The meaning of that event was enormous, knowing she could have all the blessings, rites, and ordinances of the Church.

Fast forward to October 2013, a year after my rebaptism in the Church. I returned to the Salt Lake temple for the first time since October conference of 1978, a span of thirty-five years. Coincidentally, it was October General Conference weekend again, in 2013. It was also the same weekend that Ordain Women held their first action on Temple Square. Many of my close friends were involved in that event. I was supportive of them in many ways, yet my place was in the temple that weekend rather than on Temple Square.

When I went through the endowment that day in October 2013, a black man filled the role of Jehovah, and he also took me through the veil. So, for me that day, God was black. It was extraordinary, realizing that in 1978 there were no black people in the temple, but in 2013, God was black. Afterward, I called Darius Gray to tell him about it, and we both cried. For me, the shift in my temple experience between October 1978 and October 2013 signified a major healing in the Church. And, I thought that day, if God can be black in the temple, surely God can be female there, as well.

Being in the temple that day coincided with an historic call for women's ordination outside. It was a watershed moment, a shift in Church consciousness about priesthood, like the change in 1978. Feminists on Temple Square were seeking priesthood and reclaiming the word "ordain"—because historically LDS women had possessed both. Women had received five or six kinds of ordinations from 1830–50—in ministry, the Relief Society, and the temple. Yet yet in LDS tradition those were female priesthood offices, women's own line of authority. That weekend, I felt my place was inside the temple recovering my ordinations. It was an example of how we each have our own unique role or place to be. I found empowerment privately in the temple by seeking my endowment, while my friends on Temple Square found empowerment publicly by seeking entrance to priesthood meeting.

So that's enough background. I'd like to hear from you all—about your own path, where you're at, and how you feel about the temple or the Church.

FHE: I'm impressed that you find the temple empowering as a feminist. Can you elaborate more on how you find it empowering, personally?

MAXINE: Sure, when I first entered the temple in 1978, I was surprised to discover that it wasn't about marriage. All the men were sitting on one side, and all the women were sitting on the other side, rather than in couples. So, I didn't feel awkward being single. That was a big deal in the 1970s, given the intense pressures to be married and have kids. I was trying to find out who I was, independent of marriage. The temple ceremony was about our individual relationship with God, not about couples. It was about my own path to God, not marriage. It was my own initiation into sacred rites. I was thrilled by all of that. I never saw the temple ceremonies through the lens of marriage or being dependent on a husband. I received the initiatory and endowment

feeling empowered and consecrated to God, not inadequate or incomplete in any way. I didn't pay attention to the one or two brief references about a husband because they didn't apply to me nor to the ceremony. The initiatory and endowment are inductions into priesthood and your own ascent to God. That's empowering.

I had a spiritual experience about priesthood in the temple, my first time in 1978. When I was "set apart" as a missionary, I felt something tangible conferred on me, a spiritual authority or mantle that stayed with me throughout my mission experience. However, when I went through the initiatory and endowment in the temple, I felt a bigger spiritual mantle descend on me, of the priesthood. I had no idea what type of priesthood it was, but I knew spiritually that I had just received priesthood in some form. I had no historical knowledge of that idea in 1978, it was only a spiritual sense, yet I knew it was real. And that sense of priesthood stayed with me all through my mission, and beyond. It gave me confidence and ability to minister, with power. In fact, my experience in the temple that day in 1978 drove me to research women's priesthood and theology in the 1980s.

Today, I love the symbolism of the ritual, the spiritual and esoteric meanings. The endowment is a rite of redemption, a sacred pattern of salvation—about the soul's descent from the realm of God, its awakening within the fallen world, and its ascent back to heaven. This is the archetypal journey of the soul, to discover its true self or nature, the "hero's journey" through departure, testing, and return. It feels ancient, like entering a mystery rite in a temple from another time. I love the initiation rites and white vestments of temple priesthood. I see them as ordination rites into "highest and holiest priesthood," and the fullness or "pleroma" of the Gods.

I see the endowment as an inspired midrash of Genesis that finishes or completes the theological story of Adam and Eve. It redeems them from the Fall via *gnosis* or spiritual knowledge of their divine identity,

which returns them to God's presence. It also redeems us, the human family, along with Adam and Eve, via knowledge of our true identity as divine beings, co-eternal with God, which brings us into communion with God. I see Adam and Eve as theological beings. They emerge from an androgynous being of clay, "Adamah" whom God divides into male and female humans, Adam (man) and Havah (life) before they fall into mortality. They are archetypal figures representing duality—male and female, masculine and feminine, physical and spiritual, mortal and eternal aspects of human being. The temple rites unite men and women in rituals that integrate the masculine and feminine and resolve duality into unity. On a literal level it joins couples in sacred marriage. On a theological level it returns the fallen human to heaven, marries the genders, mends duality, unites the mortal and eternal, reunites our souls with God. On a psychological level it symbolizes the integration of parts of Self into wholeness, masculine and feminine, conscious and unconscious the alchemical marriage of self, or "individuation."

FHE: You talked about how you're in the Church, you left for a long period then came back and there was something different. Where I'm at right now, I have historical background and knowledge, and personal experience through feminism, that I know is true, but I know that the Church is not there. Every time I go to church, it's just like this pain—it hurts, that tension I always feel. It's not like I want to leave the Church, but it's so hard to be there and see where we could be yet where we are. Could you speak to what was different exactly that second time, of being back in the Church, and how you deal with those tensions?

MAXINE: Yes, I wrestled with that dilemma for years before I returned. Could I really go back or not? I had a whole list of things I didn't agree with or didn't support. Then, I had a spiritual sense of reassurance that it would all work out okay because it was simple—"you need them, and they need you."

It's been better than I imagined. It works because I find a spiritual connection or resonance with members seeking God in our lives. Sure, we sometimes have different views on theology or doctrine or history, but that's true at a scholarly conference or a family reunion. I don't expect anyone to hold my view. I don't go to church for shared ideology, I go for the shared spiritual experience of a group of souls gathered to pray and seek God's love, light, inspiration. That works.

Also, returning works because *enough* had changed to create a new relationship. I didn't go *back* to something I left behind, I went forward to something new. In twenty years' time, I evolved and so did the Church: everything had changed. The Church is now publishing topics and materials that caused my exit—women's feminist history and theology are online and in new books. Compared to 1993, this is Camelot. BYU offers feminist classes with theories and topics that Cecelia K. Farr and Gail Houston were fired for teaching, even a minor in women's studies. BYU professors and LDS leaders share views that were once feminist and talk about women's priesthood in public. There are still points of disagreement between my views and Church curriculum or policies, but those our opportunities to work on our relationship. However, today I find a higher degree of compatibility with the Church than before, which is encouraging.

I feel empathy for your dilemma—feeling pained or alien at church. There are days when I can't avoid the distance between my view and theirs. So I focus on our bond as human beings, our shared spiritual struggles. That dissolves the social gaps. We're all God's children seeking our true home. Belonging can be situational depending on your ward and leaders. Yet I think one key to belonging is your own empowerment, within. That's not something anybody can give you or take away. It's your connection to God. Every person who tries to shut you down is an opportunity to strengthen your connection to God.



It's also an opportunity to practice ministry, by addressing others' fears. One day, I was quoting from the "Doctrine of Inclusion" in Relief Society and a sister objected to my sharing something secular. I explained that it was Elder Ballard's talk in the 2001 *Ensign*, and she was truly grateful to know about it. Another time, I was teaching the Young Women about Miriam, Moses, and Aaron as the three prophets who led Israel together. The bishop looked doubtful and worried, so I read Exodus 15:20–21, Micah 6:4, and Numbers 12:1–8, which consoled him. The young women loved it, they were saying, "Miriam was a prophet? That's so cool!" It empowered them.

FHE: In the Doctrine and Covenants, it seems like Joseph Smith in certain places asserted his ultimate authority to quell attempts at receiving revelation from people who weren't the prophet. You seem to view him as someone who wanted his authority checked or balanced by other leaders. Do you think that's a more accurate view of him than this authoritarian version of him in scriptures?

MAXINE: I see both sides of Joseph—the authoritarian and egalitarian; they both show up in his relationships and leadership, and his dictation of scriptures. Everything is filtered through his personality, his lens. Some passages in the D&C speak in ominous patriarchal authoritarian voice and other passages speak with a sublime spiritual quality of wisdom. Section 132 reflects the best and worst of Joseph's prophetic voice—it asserts his authority over Emma and threatens her with destruction if she doesn't practice polygamy, yet it envisions a true equality of Gods, the equal exaltation of men and women in heaven.

Joseph radically empowered women in ministry and priesthood, yet disempowered or harmed women in polygamy. I see both as real. Regarding who gets to receive revelations—in D&C 28, Joseph appeals to that story in Numbers 12 that I was teaching the Young

Women—about God appearing to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. They're all prophets, but Moses has a different relationship: "With him I speak face to face clearly." This definition of prophetic role is invoked in D&C 28:2–3, and D&C 8 to answer the question of who gets to receive revelation. Joseph's revelations are saying that we all have visionary or prophetic potential but we each have different callings, offices, and abilities.

Anyway, I recognize both sides of Joseph, positive and negative, the inspired and tragically flawed. It's not realistic to choose one extreme, saying Joseph was only an abuser, or always pious. There's evidence for both, but neither is the sum total of him. Joseph had higher visions of life and people that lifted them to new heights; yet he also harmed people. We need to see both sides, I think.

FHE: We got a new stake president and they invited him and his wife to speak. They didn't allot specific time to either. His wife took two minutes and he took twenty. I had this thought "Why are you sitting down? Take your time." It was her decision. There's no doubt there's this patriarchal system, but we're half the problem I think, if we're not rising or claiming our own power.

MAXINE: I agree

FHE: I ask myself all the time—how do I feed into this patriarchal system? I think this has been indoctrinated in me since I was two. How do I, as a woman, claim *my* power, even if that system wasn't there? I don't know if I would rise to claim it.

MAXINE: That relates to empowerment, which I see as inner validity or authority. I call it the "inner ordination" from God, who loves you and gave you existence. Your validity comes from your own eternal

spirit. We peel back layers of social conditioning to discover we are divine beings of light—and how precious we are, how deserving to be ourselves and express our unique existence in this world. You have a divine right and responsibility to find your own voice and place. Validity is truly inner. Others can certify us with status, office or degrees, but where it happens is inside.

This is the lesson I learned outside of the Church. I took a path of ministry seeking ecclesiastical ordination, yet I found it in the solitary journey of self, alone with God. I experienced the inner spiritual ordination. Once you find that spiritual anointing or chrism or grace, you've got it and nobody can extinguish that, unless you let them. That's what enabled me to come back to Church and find my authentic space neither shut down nor driven out.

You don't have to leave the Church like I did, to find inner ordination—it's a private process, between you and God. It doesn't matter where you're located. Once you experience the inner chrism, you're empowered, regardless of what others do. The Gospel of Philip describes this beautifully—"when it is revealed, then the perfect light will flow out on every one. And all those who are in it will receive the chrism... And none shall be able to torment a person like this, even while he dwells in the world... The world has become the Aeon (eternal realm) . . . fullness for him . . . it is revealed to him alone."<sup>4</sup>

This passage is talking about the mystery of the "bridal chamber" within us, where our soul discovers its oneness with God's divinity. That's what Joseph Smith was talking about in his King Follett sermon, and in the temple endowment—that when we discover God's spirit is like ours, we "ascend" to God. He said that was the whole purpose of

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4. *The Gospel of Philip*, translated by Wesley W. Isenberg in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 139–60; the text is available online at <http://gnosis.org/naghamm/gop.html>.

temple rites—our ascent. I think this unity of our spirit with God’s, or “bridal chamber,” is a higher meaning of the temple rites. The “celestial marriage” necessary for exaltation with God may be our own soul’s relationship or oneness with God. On a literal physical level, a sealing rite between two human beings at the altar is incredibly beautiful and real, sanctifying a relationship of soul mates. Yet it also has symbolic meaning about recovering your spiritual union with God, which is eternal and core to your being. You and God are made of the same uncreated light—“intelligence or the light of truth was not created or made” (D&C 93:29). So at the innermost level, you are married to God.

FHE: That really helps a lot, thank you. Ok, then how do you handle it when someone objects to the views you share or your way of participating?

MAXINE: I validate both sides, theirs and mine. There’s no fight when both sides are valid. We’re both children of God, I honor that, which allows us to be different. If someone has a problem with me, I talk with them to figure it out together. If that doesn’t work, I go home and pray for more insight, to see what I’m not seeing. Sometimes I’m prompted to hold my position, other times to concede. Conflict can relax when your refuge is found in God, not in approval from the other person. I try to find higher wisdom and listen, hear it.

FHE: I’m appalled that you were even excommunicated. I know it was a different time, but something I’ve been talking about with my room-mates is that it still happens. Like that former bishop [Sam Young] who was excommunicated for publicizing the problem of sexual abuse. I find myself a little bit in fear of excommunication because my stake president has taught and made homophobic comments. So, in my own stake, in my own ward, I don’t feel safe to express myself. I feel like

there's so much inconsistency, depending on who your local leaders are, you can be excommunicated for anything. I don't want to keep reinforcing this patriarchal mess.

MAXINE: That's an awful place to be in, that fear of discipline; it's not fair or healthy. You don't want to feed into that dynamic of fear. How do we break out of that? We change the dynamic from fear to compassion. We stop seeing each other as the enemy; in reality we're spiritual siblings, and we need each other. That was the shift I made between 1993 and 2012. I changed my view of male leaders, which in 1993 was polarized. I lacked compassion for them, I thought they were the enemy. Seven years later, when working together on the Olympics, I realized they weren't the enemy—they were my brothers. That radically changed our relationship to a far more realistic and positive one.

This came up recently with Gina Colvin in New Zealand. She and her bishop got into a polarized tension that felt unsolvable, and excommunication seemed unavoidable. Then it completely reversed at the last minute. She did deep soul searching and praying, while hundreds of friends wrote letters to her stake president and bishop. Their perspective of Gina shifted to realizing she wasn't the enemy—she needed their support. They told her, "We should be building a bridge with you, not a wall." The discipline dissolved.

It's a whole different narrative to find an unexpected bridge between feminists and male leaders. It reminds me of that scene from *Indiana Jones*, where he has to step into an abyss, relying only on faith that he won't fall—then suddenly an unseen bridge appears. There's an invisible bridge hiding between us and the opposite side. It's Christ, the true mediator. If we pray for His help, an invisible bridge may appear. A bridge doesn't mean you give in, go along with the other side. You have to find your own position first, you can't find a middle ground or a bridge without both sides holding their own ground. Then, in that

tension between two different places, a bridge can appear—if you’re both seeking a vision beyond your own positions. When I returned to the Church, my leaders and I were in unknown territory, wondering how do we do this? We both turned it over to Christ and the invisible bridge appeared. That’s the best answer I have for the fear between feminists and leaders.

FHE: What do you think is the best way to communicate frustrations to the Quorum of Twelve or the First Presidency—the decision makers—in a way that won’t turn them off or invalidate your own voice, but that actually inspires changes? We have these conversations only in small, very safe groups, with people who think like us. I am pained by not seeing Heavenly Mother in the temple and I’ve talked to many people who have that same pain.

MAXINE: I feel that pain too, every time I’m in the temple.

FHE: What do you think is the most effective way to communicate that there is a large sector of the church population that has that frustration? Are the decisions makers aware of how widespread our frustration is on that, or other issues?

MAXINE: Leaders in Relief Society, the Quorum of Apostles, and Public Affairs are all listening to women, including feminists, they’re hyper-aware of women’s concerns and complaints, and using that info for positive changes, which will continue. Public voices are noticed, read, considered. They also pay attention to private letters; they read their mail and often respond. I didn’t learn that until 2012.

How can you be heard without taking it so far you are alienating? Since they are paying attention, you don’t have to overstate or hammer your point. Just be honest and thoughtful, pray about it, and share

information they can use. You can simply record a podcast, write a blog, or an article—like our discussion tonight for *Dialogue*.

For example, when Lester Bush wrote an article in *Dialogue* about the exclusion of black members from priesthood, it was 1973, not a progressive time. Yet President Kimball read and studied that article; his copy of *Dialogue* was covered with red marks.<sup>5</sup> That article prompted him to pray about the topic, and he received a revelation, changing the Church policy about black members.

FHE: In my previous ward I was put on a do not ask to speak or teach list, which I didn't know until my current bishop told me about it. He called me to be a teacher for the *Saints* book, which I was so excited about. Anyway, this bishop shared with me experiences that he's had with Heavenly Mother in the temple.

MAXINE: What a great bishop.

FHE: He really is. Yet, there are many who abuse their power or are stuck in their white male privilege and have no idea what's happening in our lives.

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5. Rebecca England related this story to me on Nov. 13, 2018. "Jordan [Kimball, grandson of Spencer] and I found the marked-up Lester Bush article in SWK's copy of *Dialogue* when we were sorting through their house on Laird Dr. after Camilla's death. When he studied an article, SWK would underline in red pen or pencil—red underlining, meant he studied the article carefully. None of the other *Dialogues* or articles were marked up like that. We looked through all the *Dialogues* to see if any others were marked up similarly and none were except Lester Bush's article. So, it made a strong impression on both of us. This would have been about 1989. We mentioned this in a conversation in 2009 and Greg Prince followed up with questions. One of Jordan's cousins inherited the *Dialogue*."

MAXINE: That's a vestige of women's lost authority which male leaders subverted, starting with Brigham Young in 1845, then priesthood correlation in 1908–1970. Eliza R. Snow held onto female authority until her death in 1887. One of her last statements asserted “The Relief Society is designed to be a self-governing organization . . . to deal with its members . . . instead of troubling the Bishop.”<sup>6</sup> From Emma to Eliza to Emmeline, women were organized to work through the R.S., not through male leaders. It was a female line of authority from the ward to the top of the Church, where the Relief Society President and LDS President conferred. So, I don't see a solution, other than restoring the Relief Society's full authority.

FHE: I've been really trying to navigate this. I was open with my ministering brothers about all my struggles then I went to my bishop and I feel this fear, at the core—is God sexist? I know that in my communion with Him, He's not, and She's not, and They are not. I want to thank you for bringing in so much history and the spirit of our male and female Gods to show there is no sexism in the true plan of it all.

MAXINE: I really believe our history reveals a theology of gender equality, on all levels of the Church, from missionaries to ward and stake leaders, to the temple rites, to male apostles and female disciples. That blueprint of equality keeps me going.

FHE: Learning more about that gives me the strength to try to find my place. If you could share more of your experience of how to negotiate that equality—it seems like you have the inner ordination that you talked about. You gave me words for what I'm trying to find and

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6. Eliza R. Snow, “To the Branches of the Relief Society,” Sept. 12, 1884, *Woman's Exponent* 13, no. 8 (Sept. 15, 1884): 61.



trying to understand. I want to be a change maker in every part of my life, but I can't do that in the same way in the Church. Or, at least I don't know how to. Some of us live our lives at this higher level of equality so we're trying to bring the Church there. But how do I or how do you do that? What do you choose to say or not to say? Can you expound on that?

MAXINE: First, I remember that we're all learning and growing together. So, I pray for help and it comes. The best advice I can give is turn to God.

Also, you're a lay minister, every member is confirmed or "ordained" to the ministry, according to D&C 25. We're all co-ministering the ward and stake, so what we do affects many others. Too often we focus on what we lack, not seeing the power of our voice or participation. Being aware of your effect on others enables you to be a better minister.

Also, learning ministry skills is crucial, for every member and leader. I studied ministry and chaplaincy, to learn what it means to minister. It's not about trying to convert anyone, or provide any answers. Ministry is giving others support to find *their own* answers. It's listening to them and learning what they need in this moment. When you do that, you're ministering.

A minister is a facilitator for others to work through their struggles. You hold a safe space for them to dig deep, face fears, hard issues, private trials. If they aren't safe to deal with whatever comes up, that's not ministry—which is unconditional support to face life's hardest moments and not be alone. We all need someone to hold that space for us. You never know when you might be the only one who can do that for another person.

When *you* need ministering, choose someone you trust who will listen to your struggle and honor where you're at, not judge you or impose their views on you, but allow you to find your own break-

through. Ministry is knowing the difference, between our needs and others' needs, so we don't impose or transfer our views onto another, and we don't allow them to impose their views onto us.

FHE: One of the things I love about the changes in the temple was that it took things that I was not able to reconcile in my relationship with God and adjusted most of them. It's kind of confirming the relationship I have with my Heavenly Father. But it's also given me pause to wonder about the other side of that. I don't want to think that my relationship with God is what is right for the Church—or, that every thought I have is from the spirit or is doctrinal.

MAXINE: Yes, it's healthy to know the difference between your own personal path and the collective path of the Church, and not impose them on each other.

FHE: I know the answer to this is building a relationship with God and the spirit and learning how it's talking to you. Is there a time, an experience you could share when you went too far, or realized that there was a boundary?

MAXINE: Yes, my excommunication. On one hand, I definitely felt divine guidance to compile the book, I felt aided by higher wisdom. On the other hand, I could have navigated the book's relationship to the Church more sensitively. I was out of sync with the Church, ignoring the chasm between my position and the Church status. It's important to recognize where the group as a whole is located, relative to where you are as an individual—and to deal with both, not just your own.

The freedom to follow your own path is a gift from God. It's crucial to listen to your soul and follow its call—don't shut it down. Yet that's

different from the group journey. The individual and the group each have their own developmental journey. Both deserve respect.

I was at odds with the Church in my twenties, thirties, and forties, but now I'm more in sync with it than I've ever been, which amazes me. Still, there are differences between my perspective and the Church's, which I honor. My interpretation of women's history and priesthood overlap a great deal with Church materials, yet they may never fully align. I honor my own work and inspiration by writing and publishing, and I honor the work of the Church by supporting its efforts to empower women.

FHE: Your work in the past, your research and writing received some backlash. I recently did some historical research on a difficult aspect of Church history and I started to get backlash from people at BYU about it and it made me a little afraid to continue with it. I was wondering how you continued with your work in face of external pressure and backlash against it?

MAXINE: I'm so sorry to hear that. Is it the department that's having a hard time, your professors?

FHE: No, it's peers.

MAXINE: It's often peers who put pressure on us, since they want us to be where they are. Are they more conservative than you are?

FHE: Yes.

MAXINE: That's hard. Peers can be intolerant sometimes. Backlash is often shadow projection and scapegoating, which can be destructive, harmful. It's wise to protect yourself; don't own projections. You're

the expert on you. Stay close to God, find others who support you, and stand firm in the truth of who you. Then just keep being you and doing your own work.

I try to heal the conflict via common ground. I look for areas where we agree, to build bridges, while allowing our differences. But if others' efforts are harmful or unethical it's time to stand firm, not compromise.

I get backlash from critics about my return to Church membership. Critics focus on the problems, harms, what's wrong with the Church. Seeing the Church's shadow is necessary, but it can go too far, consume you. I grew tired of talking about the problems long ago. I focus on the inspiring and empowering aspects of LDS theology and practice because that's where I prefer to work these days, that's where the life is.

FHE: You mentioned not depending on authorization from others. I've been thinking about that in the context of the temple changes and the role of revelation in the temple changes, or at least in the way the temple changes were released. What do you think of that intersection and how that plays into progression?

MAXINE: So, the intersection of revelation and change?

FHE: Yeah, with revelation, when it actually happens, or how a lot of women already have been living or believing these things prior to the "revelation" of these changes.

MAXINE: So, how do we view a new revelation, when it changes or reverses past policy that negatively shaped our lives, or didn't shape our lives because we didn't believe it?

FHE: Yes.

MAXINE: Should we base our beliefs and decisions on current teachings that may change? That's a crucial question in a Church that gives great authority to current revelation, teachings, and policies. The simple answer is—if a new revelation or teaching or policy is healthy and positive, it's worth supporting. Obviously, it's wise to choose teachings that resonate God's love, feed our souls and improve our lives, over teachings that harm lives or shut down souls. The burden of safety is on us, to discern true or good teachings from erroneous ones.

This returns to the question of who can receive revelation. Leaders receive inspiration for their Church callings. Members receive inspiration for their own lives. The responsibility for our decisions is ours and ours alone. Leaders have authority over Church functioning but not over members' lives. From an early age, I took my questions and decisions to God, rather than to my parents or to the Church. A few times, my parents or the Church were right, and I was wrong, but I made my own decisions. When I followed my own conscience, things went well, but when I followed others' advice against my intuition, I regretted it, majorly. When we give our decisions over to someone else, we lose our divine guidance.

FHE: As a follow-up comment, I approach things in a similar way. I study religious history, specifically the Reformation and I somewhat identify as a Reformation spiritualist—the institution isn't what is going to shape me, it's going to be my relationship with God and my understanding of theology.

MAXINE: Well, they both shape us, profoundly, but it's our decision how much we let the Church or God shape us. That means taking responsibility for our spiritual progression, as Joseph Smith envisioned and the endowment implies. LDS faith relies on revelation, both personal and institutional, in tension with each other. This tension

is always presenting itself. Church revelation leads one direction and your inspiration may lead another direction, until you're out of sync with the Church, and you have to decide how far you're willing to go.

I was willing to follow my own spiritual path outside the Church—that was my decision. Excommunication was a revelatory “shattering of the vessels” opening a doorway to new knowledge and realms I had never known, with overwhelming positive results. Likewise, my spiritual path back home to the Church was equally revelatory and transforming. I don't regret either path, at all. So, our relationship with God may take us out of sync with the Church, or back into sync with it—depending on where we feel God is calling us. I value both equally—my relationship with God and with the Church.

FHE: I have two very separate questions. My first question is, kind of touching on what was discussed before. I feel like I've sensed for a long time a kind of a benevolent sexism. How do you address that one, when your sex has kind of put you on a pedestal? And the perfectionism that goes with it, you know, is this weird thing.

MAXINE: Gender in the LDS Church is complex. The dual tendencies of sexism and feminism are in tension with each other in Church history and ministry. This requires separating the sexism from the feminism in our tradition.

Women's status in the Church reflects both tendencies of feminism and sexism. We have a gendered ministry, which can be experienced as feminist or sexist—depending on who's managing it. Female ministry that is defined and managed by women themselves is “difference feminism” (a focus on women's different needs as a gender). Yet when female ministry is defined and managed by men, that's sexism, patriarchy. If men uphold gendered spheres, then manage both male and

female spheres, that's sexism, patriarchy. Female identity is defined by women themselves.

LDS tradition has an empowering theological blueprint that combines both gendered and ungendered authority, both separate and inclusive ministry, which evoke both difference feminism and equality feminism (a focus on women's equality with men), in balance with male authority. This original blueprint placed women in parallel partnership with men, from the ward level to the top of the Church. Yet this theological gender balance has been obscured by organizational sexism accrued over time. Our blueprint of gender balance is skewed by male privilege, which diminishes the gender equality embedded in our theology.

Yet, the theological blueprint for equality envisioned by Joseph and Emma is still visible in the Church today. We have an ungendered lay ministry of men and women preaching, teaching, leading, and managing the congregation together. We have a gendered ministry of women and men working in separate spaces and authority for gendered mirroring and mentoring. We have an inclusive temple ministry that brings men's and women's gendered authority together in an inclusive priesthood order.

Women's gendered authority was established in 1830–44, via a series of "ordinations." In 1830, Emma Smith was "ordained" to lay ministry and high Church office of Elect Lady. [D & C 25] In 1842, the Relief Society presidency were "ordained" to "preside over the Society . . . just as the Presidency, preside over the church."<sup>7</sup> In 1843, women were "ordained" as a "Priestess to the Most high God" in the temple, and also "ordained" to the "fullness" or "highest & holiest order of the

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7. Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, Mar. 17, 1842, 7, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/4>.

priesthood” in the temple.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, in 1850, Louisa B. Pratt was “ordained” a full-time missionary, which was an ungendered office.<sup>9</sup> Today, women leaders in the ward, the Relief Society, Young Women, Primary, and in the temple still have their own offices, authority, keys, revelation, and “setting apart” or ordination to lead the gendered ministry of the Church. These are ways women are ordained.

If women were ordained by men giving them Aaronic and Melchizedek orders and offices, women’s authority would come from men rather than from women’s connection to God. Our LDS tradition of female seers, visionaries, societies, ladies, presidents, counselors, boards, prophetesses, priestesses, and mother god arose from women’s own spirituality, inspiration, and innovations, as feminist theology. There is a hidden narrative within the dominant history of men’s authority, where women’s own relationship with God gave rise to their authority. Women shaped Mormon origins and development via their own spirituality and agency.<sup>10</sup> Lucy Mack, Emma Smith, Mary Whitmer, Eliza Snow, Sarah Kimball, Zina Young, Bathsheba Smith,

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8. Phineas Richards diary, Jan. 22, 1846, LDS archives, and “Meetings of anointed Quorum [—] Journalizings,” Sept. 28, 1843, both cited in D. Michael Quinn, “Mormon Women Have Had the Priesthood Since 1843,” in Hanks, *Women and Authority*, 368, fn. 20, fn. 25.

9. George Ellsworth, ed., *The History of Louisa Barnes Pratt* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1998), 100-10, 128; available online at [https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/usupress\\_pubs/92/](https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/usupress_pubs/92/).

10. Maxine Hanks, “‘A Beautiful Order’—Revisiting Relief Society Origins,” LDS Church History Symposium, Mar. 3, 2016, session 3A; also Maxine Hanks, “Visionary Sisters and Seer Stones,” Sunstone Symposium, Kirtland, Ohio, 2015; also Ian Barber, “Mormon Women as Natural Seers: An Enduring Legacy” in Hanks, *Women and Authority*, 167–84. Also see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women’s Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835–1870* (New York: Knopf, 2017).



Emmeline Wells all envisioned, organized, and led women's ministry. Joseph Smith didn't give them spiritual power—they had it themselves.

FHE: I do think it's a pretty consistent observation that benevolent patriarchy intrudes on us. Just all the pedestaling of women and overgeneralizations—like “my wife can do no wrong” or “women do everything better.” I feel like there are weird dynamics that feed into this, there's anxiety, and lack of recognition of women's reality.

MAXINE: Yes, the need to pedestalize and generalize women erases their individual voice, agency. Gender differences can't be generalized, and that's not the purpose of separate gendered space, which is to explore that gendered identity. Benevolent sexism claims to value female gender then co-opts it. Some feminists toss out gendered spheres altogether saying, ‘Men and women should have all the same options, just treat us all the same.’ Yet research shows that women and men need gendered space, as well as inclusive space, for growth. LDS Church ministry wisely uses both gendered and inclusive spaces, which provide balance.

On one level we have inclusive ministry and authority. Men and women both are confirmed to the lay ministry, then set apart or ordained to whatever callings, roles, or offices they receive. We have inclusive worship spaces—sacrament meeting, Sunday school, youth activities, stake and general conference, and the temple endowment where men and women receive the same vestments and rites, culminating in the celestial room, which brings everyone together.

On another level, we have gendered ministry and authority that focus on the needs of women or men as a group. Research on female development and education shows that women learn and perform better in female settings. Relief Society and the Young Women program provide gendered space for women to process female identity and ministry. The women's session of general conference does the same.

Also, the temple initiatory rites are sacred female space for consecrating women's personal relationship to God, which includes the Mother.

The Church provides both gendered and inclusive spaces for women's and men's spiritual development. However, some of our women's ministry and female spaces are under the direction of men—which erodes the purpose of gendered space. This is due largely to changes made by Brigham Young in 1845, when he asserted men's authority over women in the Relief Society and the temple— and we've been stuck there ever since.

FHE: Thanks for that explanation. My second question has to do with the positive outlook. We talked about President Kimball, his healing of the Church. I resonate with President Nelson bringing back some of the same kind of beautiful, prophetic, hopeful statements. How do you think changes in the temple, now and future, will potentially function with how women in the Church can have a more influential role in the growth and movement of the Church?

MAXINE: That's a big question and topic, because women's status in the temple is connected theologically and historically to women's status in the Church. Temple priesthood and Church ministry affect each other because the temple priesthood was the culmination of ministry and priesthood in the Church. Women's ministry began in 1830 and grew through stages in Kirtland 1833–36 and Nauvoo 1842–44, building upon itself until it culminated in temple priesthood 1843–44. We need a full recovery of women's 1830–44 ordinations and authority in the Church, along with a full recovery of women's ordination rites in the temple prior to 1845. Only that will complete the picture of women's original authority and its blueprint for equality and fullness.

Originally, in 1843–44, women were “anointed and ordained” to priesthood in the temple. For example, in 1843 Joseph and Emma were

“anoointed & ord[ained] to the highest & holiest order of the priesthood (& Companion) D[itt]o.”<sup>11</sup> In 1844, Heber and Vilate Kimball were both anoointed and ordained as “Prest and Prestest unto our God.”<sup>12</sup> Likewise Eliza R. Snow reported that women were made “priestesses unto the most high God.”<sup>13</sup>

However, in January 1846, this ordination rite was drastically changed by Brigham Young and re-administered to couples who had received the original rites under Joseph Smith. Brigham Young re-anoointed Heber C. Kimball, “a king and a priest unto the most high God” but re-anoointed Heber’s wife Vilate “a queen and priestess unto her husband” with all blessings “in common with her husband.”<sup>14</sup> Likewise Brigham Young was re-anoointed “a king and a priest unto the most high God” while his wife Mary Ann was re-anoointed “a queen and priestess unto thine husband” and “inasmuch as thou dost obey his counsel” would receive “exaltation in his exaltation.”<sup>15</sup>

This catastrophic change removed women’s direct personal relationship with God, and subordinated women’s priesthood under her husband’s. Women were no longer a priestess to God, but a priestess to their husband, exalted through him, not through God. Women’s

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11. Joseph Smith, Diary, Sept. 28, 1843, LDS Church Archives; Meetings of the Anointed Quorum, Sept. 28, 1843, both cited in Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, eds., *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed 1842–1845: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005), 25–26.

12. Anderson and Bergera, eds., *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed*, 54.

13. Eliza R. Snow, “An Address,” *Woman’s Exponent*, 2 (Sept. 15, 1873): 62.

14. First entry in the “Book of Anointings,” Jan. 8, 1846, quoted in David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco, Calif.: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 87–88.

15. “Book of Anointings,” Jan. 11, 1846, quoted in Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness*, 88–90.

own authority as “priestesses to the most high God” was erased. Also gone was women’s direct unmediated relationship with God.

This temple change in 1846 was only part of a larger diminishment and erasure of women’s authority and priesthood that occurred immediately after Joseph Smith’s death in 1844. Brigham Young erased women’s independent authority and priesthood in both the Relief Society in 1845 and the temple in 1846, subverting both under men’s authority and priesthood.

Women had been “ordained” not only in the temple, but also ordained in the Relief Society. The Relief Society president was a prophetess with keys to receive revelation for the women and their organizations. This included revelation about the Divine Mother, as Eliza R. Snow received in October 1845. Joseph Smith didn’t articulate much about female orders or offices or theology of the Mother, because he left those tasks to the women themselves. Joseph turned the key of revelation over to female leaders to receive their own direction from God to define women’s priesthood order and offices.<sup>16</sup>

It might be the ultimate patriarchal act if men claimed revelation from the Mother to define female theology. I think it shows great wisdom that male leaders haven’t done that. In 1991, President Hinckley admitted that regarding the Mother in Heaven, he could find no precedent for prayers to “her of whom we have no revealed

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16. “He spoke of delivering the *keys* to this Society . . . I now turn the *key* to you in the name of God . . . and intelligence shall flow down from this time” (Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, Apr. 28, 1842, 36–37, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/1#full-transcript>).

“Those ordain’d to lead the Society, are authoriz’d to appoint to different offices as the circumstances shall require” (Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, 8, 38, 40, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/1#historical-intro>).

knowledge.”<sup>17</sup> I remember thinking what an honest confession that was from a leader of a worldwide religion—no knowledge of our divine Mother? I saw his admission as an opening for female leaders to receive revelation from Her.

Today in 2019, new changes to the temple ceremony are beginning to address and reverse the historical loss of women’s direct connection to God. We have been waiting for this needed correction since 1845–46. Today in the temple, instead of men and women making different covenants (men to “God” and women to “husband”) they make the same covenants and they both make their covenants directly with God. No longer are women queens and priestesses their husbands; now they are queens and priestesses in the new and everlasting covenant, which refers to the fullness of priesthood and gospel—not to marriage.<sup>18</sup>

This change recovers women’s parallel status with men from their subordination under male authority, and it restores women’s direct unmediated relationship with God. This is a momentous and welcome change. It corrects women’s loss of authority—to a degree. However, it doesn’t restore their full ordination as a “priestess to God” nor the full individuality of their priesthood. We have yet to recover women’s original and independent authority in both the temple and the Relief Society, and to yet discover the fullness of both.

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17. “I have looked in vain for any instance [of] a prayer to ‘our Mother in Heaven . . . I may add that none of us can add to or diminish the glory of her of whom we have no revealed knowledge” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “Daughters of God,” Gordon B. Hinckley address, Oct. 1991, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1991/10/daughters-of-god?lang=eng>).

18. “*The new and everlasting covenant is the sum total of all gospel covenants and obligations. . . . Marriage is not the new and everlasting covenant’ . . . This covenant includes all ordinances of the gospel*” (Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980], 158; Packer is here citing Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1 [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954], 156).

However, this change is an enormous move in the right direction. The restoral of women's original rites and ordination to priesthood in the temple could reverberate onto women's preparatory ministry in the Church—the Relief Society, and Young Women—encouraging a full restoration and articulation of our historic female ministry and ordination. The keys, ordinations, orders, and offices of Relief Society and Young Women could return from the pages of our history, along with women's sacred rites and ordinances, including blessings and healings. Perhaps we could also recover the presence of our Mother in the temple, the female Elohim. We have an extraordinary women's ministry of theological equality that has survived and is still functioning—even though perhaps not fully self-aware, named, or articulated, and not fully enacted or empowered, yet.

FHE: Amen. Can I say thank you for fighting for us, for paving the way? Thank you for coming back. I feel inspired by your example and your spirit. I'm interested in your faith transition and progression. It doesn't seem like you ever lost faith in God or in Christianity or the restoration, even. How was that in your twenty years away? And do you think there's a spot in Mormonism for just cultural Mormonism?

MAXINE: Yes, there are countless people who are inactive LDS yet still identify as part of the "Mormon" tradition culturally or ethnically. I think there's space in Mormon culture to be whoever or wherever you are in the Mormon journey.

Actually, I went through a journey of extremes, beginning on my mission in the 1970s, then going inactive from Church in the 1980s, then publishing my book and leaving the Church in the 1990s, then finding oneness with God in the 2000s, then returning LDS in the 2010s. Each decade held a new paradigm. I went through many stages including atheism, agnosticism, gnosticism, and mysticism, which

taught me to find my own light in the face of emptiness and darkness. It was gnostic Christianity where I found my inner spiritual core; and in the Christian liturgical year, I found my spiritual formation path. I found oneness with God, exactly as Joseph Smith described it in the King Follett sermon. Then I felt spiritually called to come back to the LDS Church and bring everything I'd learned, to see if I could integrate it all, somehow. I thought, "thanks a lot God, that's a big job," but I'm back, and trying to integrate it.

Long story short, I honor everyone's journey of the soul. Nobody can tell you how it's supposed to go; the map is within you. All you can do is try to listen to your highest most reliable guidance and see where it takes you. My path gave me what I was looking for, everything I wanted and needed. It transformed me. I would not have been able to come back and do what I'm doing now if I hadn't taken that journey. And it's not over, the inner path is still moving me forward into new knowledge and larger vistas, every year.

**DIALOGUE:** Thank you everyone for this great conversation. Before our closing prayer, I have a couple of final questions. One is, if you could go back and talk to the young feminist Maxine—trying to navigate and come to terms with her religious community and spiritual self—what would you tell her? The other is, what other changes do you see happening that you're inspired by or excited about in the Church?

**MAXINE:** I would tell her, don't doubt yourself, have confidence in your work, you're on the right path, go for it. You deserve the best things in life, college degrees, a career, a great husband. Do not diminish yourself.

What am I excited about? All the new women's history coming from the Church, resources and books from Kate Holbrook, Jenny Reeder, Lisa Tait and other Church historians, and the Joseph Smith Papers.

I'm excited about the new ministering emphasis in the Church, which evokes the 1830 lay ministry in D&C Section 25, where the promises given to Emma are ours. Every member is a lay minister, and we're beginning to grasp the power of that and learning how to minister. I'm excited to see women's ministerial authority coming back and I hope we recover the "fullness" of 1842–44. I can't imagine a more exciting time in the Church and Mormon studies, as we're recovering our women's history and our empowerment.

I'm excited for you young women and men because of where you're at right now—the knowledge and sophistication you have is far beyond anything I had at BYU in the early 1980s. The courage and verve of your generation, where you're starting from is so powerful, you can do anything.

Today, you have freedom we did not have, freedom to find yourselves, to be what you want to be, to express yourselves. You have tremendous opportunity. I hope you seize it and dare to be yourself fully, share with the world what only you can bring to it.

Thanks for letting me share some of myself with you tonight.