

Should gay Mormons marry women?

Some say it's an option

by [Peggy Fletcher Stack](#)

June 22, 2012

c. 2012 Salt Lake Tribune SALT LAKE CITY (RNS) In the summer of 2008, Sarah Irish Nicholson's well-ordered Mormon life was unraveling, and she needed someone to talk to.

Nicholson's husband of 13 years, whom she had loved since they were madrigal partners in high school, told her he was gay. Latter-day Saints in her suburban neighborhood west of Salt Lake City kept saying gay-rights advocacy was Satan's work, she said.

Though the couple remained together at first, several local Mormon leaders were not only unsympathetic, they also were openly hostile to the news.

Nicholson, who still was clinging to her LDS faith, wanted a place to share stories, cry, laugh and encourage. She turned to straightspouse.org, an umbrella organization for some 55 similar groups.

But she felt many of those posting there were bitter and just wanted to vent. So she launched straightspouses.org, which invites people to join a private Facebook support group.

Last fall, there were 14 members. Today there are 45, mostly Utah Mormons, but some in other states and other faiths.

Now the rest of the world is taking note of Mormon "mixed-orientation marriages," as they have become known, thanks to a recent blog post in which Josh Weed and his wife, Lolly, told the story of their relationship.

Weed, a marriage and family therapist in the Northwest, has known he was gay since his teens, and Lolly was the first person he told. They've been married 10

years and have three daughters.

Weed's post went viral, generating more than 3,000 comments, and he was inundated with media requests.

Yet if Josh and Lolly Weed have become the LDS' best-known "mixed-orientation marriage," the stories of other couples in similar circumstances show there is no single answer for every situation.

Just a few weeks before Weed's revelation, a similar story was making the rounds in LDS circles when Ty Mansfield, a gay Mormon married to a woman, was featured on the May/June cover of LDS Living magazine.

In 2004, Mansfield wrote a section of the book "In Quiet Desperation: Understanding the Challenge of Same-Gender Attraction." As a single man with same-sex attractions, he didn't believe he would ever marry. Six years later, he met the woman who would become his wife.

"Sexuality is more fluid than we think," Mansfield, a therapist in Texas, said in an interview. "Everything fell into place, and we took that step. It continues to feel like it's the right move for me."

Some Mormons are also becoming more open about their decisions.

When The Salt Lake Tribune profiled three mixed-orientation marriages in 2006, for example, the article included the Weeds. At the time, Josh Weed insisted on using a pseudonym.

"For 10 years, I felt strongly we needed to keep things quiet," Weed said in an interview from his home in Auburn, Wash. "Then that changed. My wife voiced it first. We needed to be more authentic. It was time to tell our story."

On the other hand, another gay man in The Tribune piece, who lives in the Midwest and used the pseudonym "Landon," still guards his privacy.

"Our relationship continues to be like any marriage," he said in a recent interview. "Our commitment is not influenced by that [orientation] issue."

The most open couple in the article was Ben and Jessie Christensen, of Orem, Utah.

Jessie knew Ben was gay before they married but believed they could make it work. They had two kids in 2006 and were upbeat about the future. Now they have one more child and divorced last year.

"I still think that getting married to Ben was a good decision and that it was the right one at the time," Jessie writes in an email.

Ultimately, it may have been Ben's loss of faith that doomed the marriage.

"Neither of us realized at the time how much his homosexuality affected his membership in the church and his feelings about the gospel," she writes.

Jessie is a "wonderful, wonderful person. I love her as much as I ever did," Ben said. But he said he felt dead inside, conflicted and without peace. Now Ben hopes to find a man to marry as he continues to love and support his children.

Jessica Rodgers Trueman and her husband, who came out to her right before their 10th wedding anniversary, also eventually divorced. The pair met in the theater department at college. She had known LDS gays her whole life and saw no reason why anyone would be closeted.

So it "rocked her world" when, her husband, an active Mormon, told Trueman he was gay. He also wanted to keep his orientation a secret. "I didn't know who to talk to, didn't know who I could trust," she said. "I felt ashamed."

Friends in her Idaho ward have been "incredibly loving and kind," Trueman said. But she saw her husband slip into depression, disengagement and unemployment.

Finally, her husband got a spiritual confirmation that God loved him as he was. She knew then that they should get divorced, and both would get through it.

Trueman has recently found solace in Nicholson's support group. After all, the organization's founder shares her story.

When Nicholson's husband came out, the couple, who had four kids, stayed together. Then they had a fifth child -- a pregnancy that was tough on her body and on her mind.

She had lost her Mormon community and worried that her marriage was over. One night, she recalls, she cried out to God, "Just let me die in childbirth. I don't want to

do this anymore."

Now, she is divorced and finds purpose in reaching out to other Mormon women facing a similar challenge.

She feels she has an important role to play -- sort of like a church calling.