

As Latter-day Saint men, we should want women 'in the room where it happens'

Dear fellow priesthood holders in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

Over the past year, there's been increasing discussion about the absence of women at all levels of the church leadership hierarchy and, here in the Bay Area, a policy change that removed Relief Society presidents from the stand during sacrament meetings. Many men have not taken notice. Others have written this off as agitation among a small number of disgruntled or apostate women. As a man in the midst of all of this, I can say three things with conviction. First, men should care about these issues just as much as women. Second, the vast majority of sisters who are troubled by these issues are faithful, sustain their leaders and feel deeply connected to the church. And, third, the core issue here is not whether women should be ordained or sit on the stand. Rather, the core issue is women having a meaningful seat at the table when decisions are being made, having legitimate influence and say, and having equivalent authority as men in their sphere of influence. In the parlance of the musical "Hamilton," women want to be in the room where it happens.

If this is what women want, why should men want it, too? Rather than putting forward doctrinal arguments or quoting church leaders, let me put forward a more practical perspective that hopefully most men can readily identify with.

At some point in your career, you've likely experienced one or more of the following at work:

» Important decisions about direction, projects, budgets or personnel get made but you were never consulted.

» In a large group meeting, it becomes clear that managers have already made up their mind and want people to rubber-stamp the decision and fall in line.

» In another discussion, a manager interrupts and speaks over you as you try to share a key insight.

» You've given an important responsibility, but you don't have sufficient authority to fulfill it and others can overrule you at any time.

When you experienced those things, how did you feel? Did you desperately want to make the organization successful but wonder whether your contributions were truly valued? Did you question whether to maintain your level of involvement and engagement? This is, unfortunately, how many women feel within the church.



Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints await the morning session of General Conference on April 1, 2023.

LEAH HOGSTEN | Tribune file photo

So, at a practical level, here is why it's in your self-interest, as a man, to want to change this dynamic for our sisters:

Better decisions being made. Despite their best intentions, sometimes leaders are not aware of needs or mistakenly assume they know how members feel about a topic. While it requires more work, gathering multiple perspectives leads to better decisions and fewer unintended consequences.

Greater buy-in and commitment to those decisions. When decisions are simply handed down, the most the leader can hope for is unenthusiastic compliance (and a good amount of quiet second-guessing in private). Instead, inclusive decision-making produces broad buy-in and members who give their full effort. Those who are consulted are often converted.

Deeper, higher-quality relationships. Ultimately, the quality of our relationships

determines the quality of our lives. As 1 John 4:19 reminds us, "we love him, because he first loved us." When members feel fully seen and heard, they will know we love them, trust will build, hearts will soften, and our wards and stakes will thrive.

Having an eternal family. At a more personal level, I'm a convert to the church and one of the beliefs that drew me into the gospel was eternal families. What we model at home and at church today influences how our sons and daughters will act in their relationships in the future—which will then compound positively or negatively through time. If your wife and daughters fall away from church activity due to lack of representation and inclusion, it will be that much harder to achieve the family life you want in time and eternity. Conversely, modeling true equality now can produce strong families that will remain active and engaged in

the church for generations.

Few of us have influence over what the church as a whole does or doesn't do related to these issues, and therefore they may seem too big for you to care about or influence. But similar to the saying "think globally, act locally," you can take one important first step—you can choose to model these behaviors and principles in your homes and wards. You can do better than what you experienced in the work examples described earlier. As a people, our collective objective is to bring God's children unto Christ and to build Zion. There is no doubt that to accomplish these worthy goals, we need the women of the church by our sides and in all "the rooms where it happens."

Gregory Pal, is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints living in the Bay Area. Whether at work, church, or the other communities of which he's a member, he is working to create greater representation and inclusion for people of all genders, races, sexual orientations, and backgrounds.

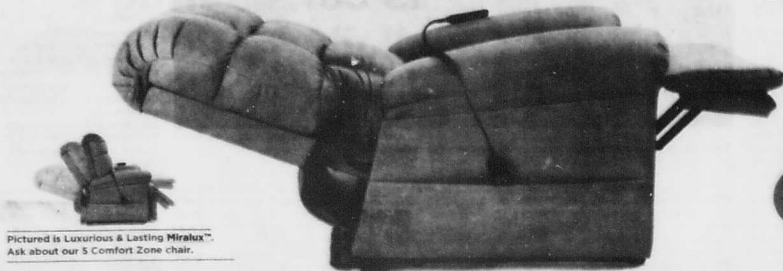


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