

FAITHFUL DISAGREEMENT:
POLYAMORY
IN COMMUNITY OF CHRIST

FEATURING



**ELLE
MILLS-WARNER**



**EVAN
SHARLEY**

THE TRANSCRIPT

Message to the Reader

Doctrine and Covenants 161:3 says:

“A. Open your hearts and feel the yearnings of your brothers and sisters who are lonely, despised, fearful, neglected, unloved. Reach out in understanding, clasp their hands, and invite all to share in the blessings of community created in the name of the One who suffered on behalf of all.

B. Do not be fearful of one another. Respect each life journey, even in its brokenness and uncertainty, for each person has walked alone at times. Be ready to listen and slow to criticize, lest judgments be unrighteous and unredemptive.

C. Be patient with one another, for creating sacred community is arduous and even painful. But it is to loving community such as this that each is called. Be courageous and visionary, believing in the power of just a few vibrant witnesses to transform the world. Be assured that love will overcome the voices of fear, division, and deceit.

D. Understand that the road to transformation travels both inward and outward. The road to transformation is the path of the disciple.”

The transcript you are about to read is the stories of two polyamorous women who have felt lonely, despised, fearful, neglected, and unloved within Community of Christ. They are crying out from the desert and literally begging for you to be patient, open your hearts, listen to their stories, and be slow to criticize how they have structured their families. They want you to be courageous and visionary, and help love overcome the voices which want you to fear polyamorous families.

It is our prayer that our vulnerability and transparency helps create greater understanding and acceptance.

Panel Information

2023 Sunstone Symposium

Session #224: Faithful Disagreement: Polyamory in Community of Christ

10:25 AM – 11:55 AM in room 200 D

Audio of the panel (courtesy of the 2023 Sunstone Symposium) along with a digital copy of the transcript can be downloaded here:

heartofdiscernment.com/polyamory-panel

Session Description

Community of Christ has a reputation for being one of the most progressive and inclusive churches within the Restoration. However, even it struggles to accept some people that they don't understand, such as polyamorous families.

In 2022 and 2023 polyamorous families and their allies have fought for dignity and equality in Community of Christ, achieving some successes, but also major setbacks. Community of Christ's First Presidency has declined to engage in a dialogue to learn more about polyamorous families, yet still issued a policy barring polyamorous people from holding the priesthood ("The February Policy").

In light of this, two polyamorous transgender women are taking the initiative to raise awareness about polyamorous families and the challenges they face within Community of Christ.



Biographical Sketches

Elle Mills-Warner



Elle Mills-Warner grew up in Ogden, Utah as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In her youth she questioned the Church and left in her late teens. Elle began attending Community of Christ in early 2020 and was confirmed January of 2021. Elle was a faithful member until she resigned in March of 2023 over the First Presidency's statement condemning polyamory as incompatible with priesthood.

Elle also holds a Master's Degree in Divinity from Starr King School for the Ministry. She has a diverse spiritual background including long term exposure to Roman Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, Neopaganism, Unitarian Universalism, and various mystical traditions. She and her partner, Dusty Trent, lead a Bible study every Monday at 7 PM at First Baptist Church of Salt Lake called "Queering the Bible", studying scripture through a queer lens.

Evan Sharley



Evan Sharley hails from Boise, Idaho and was raised within the LDS church. At the age of 20, she read the CES Letter, prompting her to mentally distance herself from the LDS church and officially resigning after the implementation of the November Policy. Despite this departure, spirituality remained a vital aspect of Evan's life, leading her to embark on a two-year Buddhist ministry course. During this period, she also discovered a profound connection with psychedelics, deepening her spiritual exploration. Throughout her journey, Evan yearned to find a place within the Restoration tradition and discovered that Community of Christ's aspirations resonated quite well with her values. In February 2021, she was confirmed as a member of Community of Christ.

Unapologetically, Evan identifies as a bisexual, polyamorous, transgender woman. Her unwavering openness about her identity has unfortunately made her a target of both explicit and implicit bigotry from conservative and moderate members of Community of Christ. Nonetheless, she remains resolute in her efforts to raise awareness and advocate for equality, firmly believing that such progress is inevitable.

Transcription Information

- Skipped the introduction information, as a lot of it was just reading the introductions we have
- Removed filler words “um”, “kind of”, “uh”, etc
- Grammatical fixes to make the transcript easier to read

Other Resources

“The Polyamory Primer” - a brief explanation of polyamory through the lens of polyamorous members and friends of Community of Christ

<https://heartofdiscernment.com/polyamory-primer/>

“Ministry to Polyamorous Families” - a 3-week course which dives deeper into the nature of polyamorous families through the lens of polyamorous members and friends of Community of Christ

COMING SOON

“Polyamory Community of Christ & Sunstone w/ Evan Sharley” by Mormon Book Reviews

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGPDa5g-5I>

Table of Contents

Panel Discussion

Question	Page Number
1. What does polyamory mean to you and how is it different from polygamy?	8
2. What is a high and low of being polyamorous?	10
3. The First Presidency recently released a policy which said that "priesthood members should not be involved in consensual non-monogamous relationships". What does this policy mean to you? What is your relationship like with Community of Christ after the policy?	13
4. What changes or actions would you like to see from Community of Christ to address the needs and concerns of polyamorous individuals and families?	18

Questions and Comments From Audience

Questions and Comments From Audience	Page Number
1. "Ally" vs "Accomplice"	21
2. How Do We Prevent Ecclesiastical Abuse?	25
3. Are there any resources for education?	28
4. We can learn a lot from the polyamorous community	30

Panel Discussion

1. What does polyamory mean to you and how is it different from polygamy?

Elle

So, the thing that has come up quite a bit is this conflation of polyamory and polygamy, particularly fundamentalist-style polygamy. One thing that I wanted to talk about is how I ended up becoming polyamorous and why it is absolutely incompatible with fundamentalist-style polygamy.

I actually had dreams of being in a monogamous marriage through my youth. When I started my gender transition I still had that as an ultimate goal in my mind. When I first started transitioning I started dating a number of cis[gender] straight guys - and cis straight guys I love you to death - but that was eye opening - we'll say eye opening.

I had some issues with the way I was treated on these dates. This was sort of this feeling that I owed these guys something, and that they had some kind of possession or ownership of me. This was a number of men that I dated. I got to the point where I just stopped dating cis straight men altogether, and I realize there are wonderful cis straight men out there, but I am not going to spend a lot of time weeding through them to find them.

It made me start questioning what I actually wanted in a relationship, and it made me start questioning the idea of marriage as it pertained to me. I didn't want to participate in a system that, historically, up until maybe 60 years ago, was literally about owning women and transferring women as property from father to husband. This has been the history of marriage. When I let this dream of mine go - of marriage - I started asking myself, "Well, what do you actually want in a relationship?", and what I want in a relationship is family.

What family looks like to me is not going to be a spouse and kids - I've never wanted kids. I ventured down this road of polyamory, and it ended up being a source of great love in my life, and a source of deep spiritual connection that I have to this entire poly[amorous and] queer family that I have. It's not about ownership. Very specifically in my relationships we have talked about how we do not own each other, we do not control each other, we do not have any kind of possession over each other. We are voluntarily in this as a relationship. This is really incompatible with fundamentalist-style polygamy, which often *is* about ownership of women, and is about control of women.

[Polyamory] is entirely about my autonomy, and my partners' autonomy. So, when it gets conflated with abuses that happen in polygamy; when it gets conflated with patriarchy that is involved in polygamy; when it is conflated with all of these other things, it really upsets me

because I came to polyamory from a complete opposite angle, and it is why I have remained polyamorous.

Evan

I feel relatively similar to Elle. To me, polyamory means you can love more than one person. I saw a quote one time that said something to the effect of “We all love different people at different points in our lives” - we may have different marriages over time due to death or what have you - “with polyamory, we can just love all of those people at the same time.”

One of the big distinctions for me, between polygamy and polyamory, is that polygamy almost always has some sort of a religious connotation, a religious mandate. [With Polygamy] We’ve all heard that you need 3 wives to go to the Celestial Kingdom, but there’s absolutely *nothing* like that in polyamory, because it’s not attached to religion *at all*.

Another big distinction for me is that polygamy is about men having multiple wives. Polyamory does not make those same sort of distinctions - men can have male partners, female partners, non-binary partners; women can have [multiple] partners, non-binary people can have [multiple] partners, it’s not a set “this is what you have to do.” It’s much more based on the people within the relationships structuring their families how they feel comfortable and what brings them a lot of joy and meaning, instead of having this be a religiously mandated thing that you *have* to do to go to heaven.

There’s that dynamic there where polygamy is very much patriarchal, whereas, polyamory isn’t. So I am a transgender woman, I’m married to my wife, and my wife and I are dating a non-binary partner. So in our situation there isn’t even a man in the picture, which in itself means that it’s not polygamy.

(laughter and clapping)

It’s one of those things where people see that [polyamory is] non-monogamous and they assume that it’s the same thing [as polygamy], but once you look really any closer you see that there are some pretty fundamental differences, like there not being a man in my relationship.

(laughter)

2. What is a high and low of being polyamorous?

Elle

A high for me is this queer, very strange little family that we have created, and the amount of love that is there, and the happiness and sense of fulfillment that I have in this family, that I have not really had in my life prior to this.

It's hard for me to have this kind of love and acceptance and realize that people don't want me to have it. People want me to conform to this monogamous prescribed lifestyle that our culture has - prevailing from the moment we're born, we tell children "you'll find someone, you'll get married, you'll have kids", and it's in every Disney movie, it's in Hollywood, it's in our books; love triangles are one of the staples of romantic stories and romantic comedies, and polyamory doesn't necessarily have love triangles. I mean, it can...

(laughter)

Every polyamorous relationship is different, but I look at love triangles in movies and and I'm like "hmmm... well, there's a solution"

(laughter)

But the people aren't even willing to listen to the fact that I'm happier now in these relationships than I've ever been in my life; the people just want to take that away from me, which kind of leads into the low of it.

I feel like in a lot of social situations I can't talk about being polyamorous. There's a number of social situations where people know about my partner Dusty, and if I'm wanting to talk about wonderful things that I have going on with Matty, who I'm dating right now, because people know about Dusty I have to sit and think "How will they react to me saying I'm dating this other person? How will they react to knowing that there's this whole constellation of people in our relationships? How will they react to it? Does this affect my employment? Does this affect my safety in a situation? Am I going to have to engage in a silly conversation I don't want to engage in for 10 minutes, [as] the person trying to explain my family?" That's the hardest thing for me.

Evan

I actually experienced what I consider the high of being polyamorous a couple of weeks ago.

I really, really like Mario Kart (laughter), and I don't want to brag but I'm really good at it (laughter). My wife (Coralee) and my partner (Matthew) are not as good at it, but they're still pretty good (laughter).

My partner's name is Matthew, not to be confused with Elle's Matty (laughter). Matthew has 3 kids, one of them is 8 years old. So myself, my wife, Matthew, and Matthew's son (Odin) were

all playing Mario Kart together. We were having a lot of fun. [However,] the kid was getting kind of frustrated, because he's 8 years old and he's not as good as us. We only had 3 controllers, so only 3 of us could play at a time. And when it was Matthew, Coralee, and Odin's turn, I told Odin, "Okay, here's the deal: whoever's in first, I'm gonna tickle them so they get out of first so you have a better chance of winning the races".

(laughter)

And of course Matthew and Coralee didn't like that idea, but I was on Odin's team at that particular moment. So for that entire cup of Mario Kart, 4 races, whoever was in first I would go tickle them, and if someone else got in first I'd go tickle the other person. At one point I accidentally bumped Odin, and he said, "Hey! Be careful!" and I was like "Oh! I'm sorry Odin, I'm sorry. I got a little out of control." And so I wasn't going to do it that next race. The race got started, and I wasn't tickling the person in first, and so Odin turns to me and said, "Evan, I thought you were on my team. You need to tickle the people who are in first for me!"

(laughter)

And I was like "I am *sorry* Odin! I have failed my duties to you!"

And it was just a very sweet memory of the 4 of us just hanging out and enjoying each other's company. It was so pure and so happy, and it was just the kind of moment that they put in movies, because of how special they are. I got to experience that with my own little family. It was wonderful!

The low of being polyamorous has been quite low.

A number of years ago I worked at a company where I was talking [and] relating to people. I came out to one of the clients as polyamorous, and she was so interested and so accepting, but she didn't speak English so we had to use a translator. The translator did not like that I was polyamorous, and she went to my employer and said "You either fire her or I quit", and so I was fired for being polyamorous. And, of course, there are no legal protections, so there was nothing I could do. I was fired from my employment because of my family. That didn't feel great. That was my first big negative experience with being polyamorous.

I know a lot of you here have been along for the ride for the last year, but it has not been an easy ride being polyamorous in Community of Christ this last year.

There was no official policy in Community of Christ regarding polyamory, but they sought to take action against a polyamorous person in very, very unsavory circumstances. They said, "Oh, this policy exists", and we said "Where is it then? Show us this policy", and they couldn't.

And so, in late January [2023], the First Presidency created the policy. This policy essentially says polyamorous people can't be in priesthood under any circumstances. When we're talking about polyamory in Community of Christ, it's important to note that we're talking about less than 2 dozen people, and even fewer of those people are "out of the closet". And so, [the policy] felt like a very personal attack.

Especially since in November [2022], I actually wrote a letter to the First Presidency and I *literally* begged them not to create a policy like this. I literally - I used the words "I beg you". [In the past] I had gotten letters back from the First Presidency before, [but] I still have not gotten a letter back from the First Presidency [regarding my November letter]. That hurt; it made me feel alienated [and] "othered" in my own community. This is the community that... (points to the audience) two of those people right there I talked to less than an hour after my father passed away. I held my father's hand as he took his last breath, and then in 45 minutes I was out to lunch with my Community of Christ family. By having other members of my family do this to me was devastating. That was even harder than losing my job.

That's my low.

3. The First Presidency recently released a policy which said that "priesthood members should not be involved in consensual non-monogamous relationships". What does this policy mean to you? What is your relationship like with Community of Christ after the policy?

Elle

When the church went after this polyamorous person in really, really unsavory circumstances, I would actually say abusive circumstances, it started to feel like an attack on *me*. I reached out to a number of people in the church, and some people in the church knew I was in a polyamorous relationship [and] some didn't, but I reached out to some who did, and I had dinner with one individual [and] I went over what my relationship looked like and they basically said – because at the time I was at the time Dusty and no one else but we're *in* a polyamorous relationship - there are other people involved in this relationship; I've since started dating other people. At the time they said "Well, you're not cohabitating with Dusty right now and you haven't started dating anyone, so you're not polyamorous." That actually really hurt, hearing it phrased like that, because it's kind of like this idea that "You can be in our church and identify a certain way, but you can't actually practice that way", much like they've said to gay members of various churches - "You can be gay, but you've got to be celibate." It was this idea that somehow my relationship, even though it *is* polyamorous, wasn't because *I* wasn't dating multiple people at that time, even though my partner was, even though that door was open to me, even though I had intentions of dating other people. It was this weird technicality that just really felt like someone was throwing a bag of fleas on me.

It gave me an insight into how people were viewing this situation. I've told multiple people "You can't view polyamory as 'monogamy plus...'" Polyamorous relationships are different than monogamous relationships; it is an entire family of people. Just because at the time I was only dating one person did not mean that I was not involved in polyamory, and did not mean I didn't have relationships with these other people. Framing it as "monogamy plus..." felt like those relationships I had with these other people were being invalidated.

It seemed like after the fiasco with the church going after this polyamorous person and then stepping down from it that maybe the church had learned its lesson, maybe it wasn't going to pursue this, maybe this wasn't the hill they wanted to die on. Then the release of this policy, which they still haven't publicly acknowledged... That was it.

I have a master's degree in divinity. I have been trained for ministry. I've wanted to pursue ministry in some way, and I thought I would actually probably pursue it in some way in Community of Christ. There were members of the World Church that were definitely grooming me for leadership.

[Then] this policy gets introduced after this whole fiasco, after I'm already doubting my relationship with the church because of it, and it was this big slap in the face going "Because of

who you are, because of your family, because of the way that you love people you can't participate in this."

There's also this weird double-standard that Community of Christ has between its expectations of priesthood and its expectations of laity. The idea that you could be a lay member and be polyamorous, but not be in the priesthood and be polyamorous is a weird double-standard, and one of many that the church has. It is part and parcel for how the church is viewing polyamory in general - that it's not compatible with a "righteous lifestyle". The policy all but says that.

When Evan shared the policy with me, sent me a copy of it, I went numb for a minute. I spent about a day sitting with it. I was sitting in the apartment, and Dusty was in class on Zoom, and I started writing a resignation letter, and was just sobbing as I was writing it. I had so many beautiful relationships in this church. I had people help me through one of the hardest situations in my life when I lost my job and my housing in Seattle on the same day and had 10 days to leave my property. I had people from my church who gave me a place to live, who supported me, who helped fundraise for me to help me get on my feet. There were people whose lives I was fully invested in. It felt like all of that was for nothing with this policy. Dusty came and wrapped his arms around me and consoled me while I was writing this letter.

I sent it and I posted it in every public place I could, because I'm not someone who does things quietly. Nobody from the World Church reached out to me. Nobody. None of the people who had been grooming me for leadership. Nobody. Not one of them. That still hurts.

Then, in announcing this panel I had the audacity to just say I was on a panel, and the highest levels of leadership went on an attack offensive about this panel, trying many different ways to keep this panel from happening. And we're still here.

I don't get intimidated.

(applause)

If you want to intimidate me, there are only two people in this world who have ever intimidated me: one of them is dead and the other one is a woman in her 80's who's 4 foot 11 with a rolling pin.

(laughter)

So if you're not one of those two people, you're not going to intimidate me. I do not back down.

After resigning I ironically got *more* involved with the local congregation here and have been preaching and a number of other things. I guess now's the time to say this: with what happened in announcing this panel, and with what's happened over the last 9 months with all that has been going down, it has taken a severe toll on my mental health, and I can't keep doing this. So, after Sunstone today, I am going completely no-contact with Community of Christ. I will not be participating in worship, I will not be preaching from any Community of Christ pulpits, I will not be engaging with anybody from World Church for any reason. People who are my friends in

local congregations are free to remain in contact with me, but I do not want us to talk about the church at all. I need to close this door and move on.

Evan

I have wanted to start a dialogue with World Church. I have wanted to start a wider conversation, because it's through conversations that understanding comes. In the early 2000's Community of Christ did what we call "Listening Circles" where we basically got together and we listened to the stories of LGBT folks. These Listening Circles brought a lot more understanding of queer lives to the church, and I really want to see something like that happen on a wider level at Community of Christ. I tried to talk to leadership about doing something like this and *begging* them not to make a decision before we had gone through a discernment process like this, to use a Community of Christ term.

I wrote up this letter to my apostle, Art Smith, and he said, "Evan, this is a fantastic letter. I'm going to recommend that you actually send this to the First Presidency as well". I took his advice and I sent each member of the First Presidency a copy in November of last year. I wanted to hear back from them. When I joined the church I wrote a letter to Steve Veazey, and he wrote back to me, and so I know they read these letters. I waited, and I waited, and I waited, hopeful that we could get this ball rolling on greater understanding in the church.

Then a friend of mine said "Have you heard about this new policy?" and I said "No", and they said "Well, you should read it", and I did. I was devastated. Like I said earlier I literally begged these people - literally begged to start a dialogue and to not make a snap decision like this, because they don't have all the facts, they don't understand what it means to be in a polyamorous family. With this policy, it felt like they had no intention of listening; they had all the "facts" and they were willing to make a decision based off of the limited facts that they did have, and it *really* messed with me for a while. I felt very betrayed. I don't think I've ever felt that level of betrayal in religious circles before.

Community of Christ has painted itself as being the progressive church, the understanding church. We have this song that says "For everyone born, a place at the table", and it's sung so often in Community of Christ circles. The theology is so founded upon "We *need to include* people, we need to listen to people". Community of Christ has what we call "The Enduring Principles", which is a list of some of our core values, and some of those are things like "Unity in Diversity", "All Are Called", "Worth of All Persons". With this policy it felt like it betrayed that. It felt like we were told one thing about Community of Christ, and when it was time to put it to the test, the church failed the test.

It failed me, and it hurt. I put myself on the line by joining this community - putting my soul out there. And when I revealed a part of myself to this community, and it felt like they said "You are unworthy to be in priesthood".

Frankly, I didn't know what to do for a while. There were so many thoughts and emotions swirling around that were so big and hard for me to understand. I told everybody "I'm stepping away, and I don't know if I'm coming back." I said that very publicly.

I run a page on facebook called "Heart of Discernment" where I documented a lot of this, and what I intended as the last post on that page I said something to the effect of "My family's dignity is not a debate. My worth is not a debate. If Community of Christ can't see that, I don't know if I can stay here". Along with all of that and much more I said as well, I posted a picture of myself, my wife Coralee, and our partner Matthew, because they are what's important to me.

I felt alone during that time. I felt isolated. Distanced. So many of my friends in Community of Christ don't live in Boise; they live here in Salt Lake, across the country, and in some cases across the world. I couldn't rely on them in the same way.

I was so angry, because they didn't want to listen, they didn't want to learn about me or my family, and it hurt so bad.

I started writing. I wrote a lot just to try and organize my thoughts about what happened, about how I understand it, why it was happening, and what my beliefs are with all of this, and I ended up writing a whole book. It's a lot of feelings. I felt so much better at the end of it. Just getting it all out. At the end of it I missed my family. I missed my friends.

I am still so mad at World Church, at IHQ, the First Presidency, and so many of the apostles, for not being brave enough to learn about me and my family. But I miss my friends, and my love for them outweighs my anger and frustration. So I chose to stay in Community of Christ and keep pushing until my family's dignity is recognized. I'm here.

I have so many of my friends who are standing with me in this fight, which means so much. I see *them* as Community of Christ, not some city 2,000 miles away that I've never been to [or] people I've never met. *These* people are Community of Christ to me, and they see the worth and dignity of my family.

The reason why I feel like all of this is happening... We all come from the Restoration, well... I know you're here Steve Pynakker but you know, we all dealt with the Nauvoo era polygamy trauma and how utterly messed up all of that was. Community of Christ was founded by - Joseph Smith III was the first president of the Reorganization, and the Smiths had so much trauma in regard to how Joseph Smith Jr. behaved in the Nauvoo era. Community of Christ only within the last generation or two has admitted that that even happened. They denied it for so many years that the churches that broke off from Community of Christ *still* don't recognize all of that trauma.

That trauma is what is influencing the treatment of me today, because that trauma has not been looked at, it has not been addressed, the church has not healed from that. And so when they see someone with more than one partner they freaked out. They didn't know how to handle it because they didn't deal with the trauma of their past.

And I get it. The Nauvoo era was so, so, so messed up. But so many of us who come from a Brighamite background, we've been forced to address that a little bit more head on, because those of us who come from a Utah background it was a little more out in the open. But that hasn't happened in Community of Christ. That healing, that examination, hasn't happened and it's manifesting today. It's manifesting here - that's why we're here.

I really want to continue starting dialogues, helping World Church leadership, individual congregations, literally anybody who will listen, because this is my community; and I want my community to be a good place not only for me but for generations of polyamorous kids that will come after me as well.

It's hard.

4. What changes or actions would you like to see from Community of Christ to address the needs and concerns of polyamorous individuals and families?

Elle

World church failed us. World church needs to be held accountable. World church actively has abused us. They have done nothing in the way of reconciliation.

I mentioned that when I resigned nobody from World Church contacted me. When I announced this panel they had all the time in the world to freak out about it, to try and get this panel to stop, to try and intimidate us, to do a number of things.

Then an apostle sent a copy-pasted message to me and Evan. It started with the phrase “dear friends” which just... I was like, “I have never actually spoken to you. You’ve never reached out to me. You do not have the right to call me a friend,” and I told her that I actually wanted to talk to her. I begged her multiple times. Multiple times to talk to me. Eventually she finally relented and scheduled a conversation with me. Two days before the conversation she said that she had to cancel and that she said she could talk to me sometime in August, and I said that that’s after Sunstone; I want to address all of this before Sunstone. She told me that she couldn’t, and I said that “I understand that you are a busy woman, but you can’t carve out...” - this was 2 weeks ago! - “you can’t carve out a half hour of time within 2 weeks to talk to somebody that you have hurt?” She basically dismissed it and said “You can talk to me in August”, and I was done with that conversation.

The reaction that the church has had is one of trying to save face in this, and trying to control the narrative, and trying to make this go away.

They started this. They never had to go after this polyamorous person. They never had to introduce this policy. They never had to do any of this.

They created this problem, and they need to pay for it somehow. That needs to start with an open apology to all of us that they have hurt. If I don’t get that, this no-contact remains. That is the only form of contact I will accept from them, is an apology.

I have an anxiety disorder, and the day after all of this started happening around the panel here I had a 5-hour stretch of panic attacks, major panic attacks. I actually wondered if this was all worth it, and today I know it is. I feel like this is what I needed to do to end this; to start to move on.

I’ve been betrayed by a church before, but this one felt so personal. I felt lied to by this church. I felt like they used me as a queer person to try and look more inclusive than they actually are. They wanted queer people for their image. They wanted queer people so they could say that they looked inclusive, but they didn’t actually want *us*. They wanted queer people who looked like them, who were in monogamous relationships like them, who wanted to be married like

them. If you understand anything about the queer movement's history, then you will understand that polyamory has been part of our community from the beginning. If you want to include our community, you cannot just pretend this is not part of it.

This is not to say that every queer person is polyamorous, because that is by far not the truth, but polyamory is something that is prevalent in our community and is something that happened because we were denied marriage and we did deconstruct what relationships were. We were denied dignity and we made family work for us, and now you will not acknowledge that family and you want a queer version of yourself to make you feel like you are inclusive. I'm not going to play that part.

That is where the change I want to see begins: Atonement and accountability from the First Presidency, particularly from the Council of Twelve at this point, and from the Seventy. Atone.

Evan

I've had a lot of time to think about what I would like to see in regards to change. I think because of the Nauvoo era trauma, it's a long road, and it's going to be a really, really painful road, particularly for me.

I need allies to speak up in every facet of church life; in congregations, in Mission Centers, at World Church; in private, in public - because I cannot do this alone, and I should not be expected to do this alone.

What I feel is the first step for change is we need those listening circles. We need to just dispel common misconceptions regarding polyamory. We need to show people what polyamorous relationships look like.

Are there unhealthy polyamorous relationships? Absolutely, but we all know that there are unhealthy monogamous relationships as well.

Elle

No, that doesn't happen.

(laughter)

Evan

And so we shouldn't be focusing on those unhealthy examples and holding those up as the only [example of] polyamory, because there *are* healthy polyamorous relationships.

One of the things about polyamorous relationships, like I mentioned, we have been so stigmatized. People lose kids, people lose jobs, people lose housing over their polyamorous families, so they have to remain in the closet. And so, polyamorous families who are healthy and are long-term and sustainable you don't see because it's a safety issue.

So, when someone such as myself is open, that means that we trust you, or that we want to be trusted by you. By putting ourselves out on the line like this, we're showing that we want change, and we want to move things forward, and that's what we need to do.

My hope is that the next step after that is that the February Policy disappears. [That] the First Presidency realizes that making such a rash policy was inappropriate and they remove it from the church's policy repository, and it's not a policy anymore.

Community of Christ this year, at World Conference, passed a resolution which empowered apostles to define marriage and marriage-like relationships. One thing I would like people to know is that there *are* polyamorous relationships that are *legally* recognized in some areas. There are areas where domestic partnerships you can *legally* have a polyamorous domestic partnership. In the State of California there were 3 gay men who had all 3 of their names printed on their baby's birth certificate. In Canada there have been many instances of joint custody being awarded to polyamorous families. This is not as clear, cut-and-dry, black-and-white as people think. There is a lot of nuance, there are a lot of things happening, and it's not going to be a one-size-fits-all. With this resolution passed at World Conference this year it empowers the apostles to recognize the nuance within their apostolic field and try to embody that in more localized ways.

I *really*, really hope that the apostles crying from the desert about this, and see that it's not as clear cut, and that our families do exist, and are even legally recognized in many areas. That's really the change I want. I want equality, I want community, I want friendship, I just want to be a part of something, and I don't want to be "othered".

Questions and Comments From Audience

1. “Ally” vs “Accomplice”

Stacey

I come from a feminist studies background, and I'll also say a therapy background, and I'm really struck at some conceptualizations, different paradigms, and the words that we use and how words have power. I noticed, and I don't want to correct you, but I think about the word “ally”, and how often it has been used by individuals of power to do for - and perhaps for folks from a marginalized perspective, whether it's men to women, or white people and black people, - “Oh, you know, I'm a good person, right? Let me just do this for you,” rather than earnestly bringing folks from the margins to the table and amplifying their voices.

So I am wondering about the reconceptualization, shifting from the “allyship” towards “accompliceship”, around some people becoming accomplices and making sure that not only are they speaking for us, but they are actually amplifying voices of the margins.

If you think about apostles from Community of Christ, I suspect there are many individuals who are in that circle that would conceptualize themselves as allies, and yet they have done harm here, as they have attempted to recircle, re-fence for inclusion rather than really deconstruct the paradigms that come from Nauvoo polygamy and their conceptualization of what that might mean and the fear that comes from that.

Does that resonate with you, and maybe expound on that?

Evan

In my mind, “allyship” is not a title that you give yourself; it's something that you earn. You do it by what Stacey said: uplifting marginalized voices, such as polyamorous voices in this instance, but also in closed door discussions that polyamorous people aren't allowed to be in. You speak, you defend, you advocate for in those situations that you are privileged enough to be in, and I am not. There are people who are able to be in priesthood; I am not. I cannot go to those priesthood meetings. I cannot be in those conversations at those tables, but I have friends that are. I have friends that can help advocate for me. I've seen those friends do that for me, and it has not gone unrecognized, and I appreciate it.

But there's always more to do. Nothing's changed since the February Policy. Nothing's changed. Since last year when our friend was targeted it's only gotten worse with the policy. There's still a lot of work to be done. There's still a lot of conversations to be had, and they are so difficult, and I get it because I'm right up here bearing my soul to some people that are perfect strangers to be, because I know that it's gonna help eventually. I want my friends to do the same so that I can have the same privileges that they have right now, and the same opportunities. I would love

to be in priesthood and to serve people in a priesthood capacity, but I can't. I just can't right now, and I'd like to see that change and I need your guys' help.

Elle

There are definitely people, some of them sitting in his room, that I would definitely consider "accomplices" in this, and I thank them for that.

Those of you who are choosing to remain in Community of Christ: I need you to fight. I need you to fight for my family like you would fight for your own family. I need you to fight for Evan's family like you would fight for your own family, and any other polyamorous person.

I don't want to hear platitudes, I don't want to hear consolation, I don't want to hear an "I'm working on this", I want to see. Particularly those of you who are in church leadership, there's several in this room right now, I need you to step up and be the most vocal pain in the ass to the World Church you possibly can. I need you to be on them like shit on velcro. This needs to happen. I know there's office politics, I know that there's "I'm up for this promotion" - you've chosen yourself at that point. You are not an ally; you've chosen yourself. You need to put yourself on the line if you want to remain in relationship with me. I put myself on the line for other marginalized groups. I put my literal life on the line in one case.

You need to step up. I'm calling you out and calling you in. Choose me and my family, the people that you say are your friends. Choose me over your church and your leaders, or else you have made your choice already.

Evan

Did you have another question, Stacey?

Stacey

I'm just struck by the power of silence and how it's used as a tool.

Elle

Also, I know that people *don't* want this to happen, I know particularly World Church doesn't want it to happen: get the media involved. Get 'em involved. I'm done, and you're only protecting them by not getting the media involved. Contact the Salt Lake Tribune, contact Deseret News, contact all of them. *I'll* do it for you if you don't.

Evan

So last year we all kind of agreed that we were gonna keep it “in the family”. We wanted to try to resolve it without being more vocal in public about the growing pains that the church was going through. I am not doing that anymore. I’m here, I’m talking with you guys, I was on Steve Pynakker’s show on July 25th, 2023. I’d love to be on any other podcast or be a part of any other conversation, because ultimately it’s by having these public conversations that things are going to change.

(Music starts playing next door)

Like you were saying, Stacey, there’s a lot of power in silence... and they’re having a rock concert next door.

(laughter)

I feel like I’ve been - I know that some of my friends *within* the community that I’ve spoken to behind closed doors would disagree that I’ve been silent, but I’m going to be doing it a little bit more vocally now.

We tried to handle this “in the family” behind closed doors, but it needs to be more out in the public. It needs to be more out in the open. I have been shocked to find out how few people knew that this was arguably one of Community of Christ’s biggest controversies right now. We’re at *Sunstone*, and hardly anybody knew about this, or they heard whispers about it. *Nothing* in regards to details. *And we’re at Sunstone*. It baffles me how little people have known how big of a controversy this has been for so many people in Community of Christ.

But we gotta talk about it in order to talk about it.

Stacey

I’m just struck also by because of like, the game of telephone; how stories evolve.

Elle

Mmhmm

Evan

Yes!

Stacey

Real pieces of the stories change, so being able to have that transparency so that you know what's actually happened - bring some light in.

Anyway, I've taken up too much space. Let's open it up.

Elle

No, you haven't

Evan

You're great, Stacey

Stacey

People from the audience please come forward with questions or comments.

2. How Do We Prevent Ecclesiastical Abuse?

Attendee

Hi, I really appreciate the vulnerability that you guys shared.

I kinda wonder: how do you begin to address - you talked about the trauma, right? Having the Joseph Smith polygamy, and the Brigham Young polygamy, and this flaming sword, and this spiritual coercion into a multiple partnership situation, right?

How do you begin to address? How does that community, or this community still because I don't think the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints really dealt with that either, how does one start to?

There are these real fears of "Well, God told me that you should be married to me, obviously, and I'm in a priesthood position so I get the authority" How do you have those conversations? How does the church protect itself from that kind of a scenario where you have leaders who are - because we're all subject to the issue of the matter, or where boundaries become inappropriate for that leadership position. How do you start having those conversations? How can one reassure those in priesthood leadership positions that... How does the church protect from that kind of... what do you call it? It happens in other organizations, like colleges - University of Michigan just had a scandal where one of the top leadership was...

Do you have any...?

Evan

Yeah.

So to kind of sum it up are you saying "How do we prevent ecclesiastical abuse?"

Attendee

Yeah! Exactly, yes, yeah.

Do you think it's valid that there might be a little bit more fear there because it's not more accepted? Like, "When it's monogamy it's alright - it's closed". Anything that is like you having an 'extra relationship' seems like that's automatically wrong, right? So...

Evan

Monogamous people *can also cheat...*

(laughter)

Elle

Monogamy is not closed. Monogamy is not closed. I wanted to dispel that rumor right now

(laughter)

Evan

I think a lot of it has to do with - we gotta teach ethics. What *is* moral when you're in a leadership position?

I could flirt with somebody in my congregation, but if I was the pastor that would be a totally different story. One of the common denominators in so many of those positions is power. I don't have power, but if an apostle, or back in Nauvoo the president of the church, starts saying these sorts of things and starts threatening not only the reputation of your family but *also the salvation of your family*, that's a *HUGE* power disparity.

I think we need to be mindful of power dynamics. I think Community of Christ has started to recognize some power dynamics, but it doesn't fully understand the ramifications of how it wields that power, which could be a recipe for disaster. We need to talk about what that looks like.

Community of Christ's priesthood is a little bit different as well. Not everybody is ordained in priesthood, and when you *are* ordained into priesthood there are courses you have to undergo. I have taken a lot of those courses, but I feel like the power dynamic disparities weren't hit on quite as hard as I'd like to see in trainings like that to prevent such abuse.

Like you said, we have Nauvoo. We have that in our history. We can't say "Oh, we'd never do that", because *we already did*.

Attendee

Thank you, thank you.

Evan

Yes!

Stacey

Just so you know, in the Episcopal tradition clergy are actually *prohibited* from having any intimate relationships with their parishioners. As a psychotherapist that's why psychologists and others like social workers can't - once a patient always a patient, and you cannot have an open door relationship with a patient. So there's ways in codes of ethics to address this.

Elle

Most mainline churches have the policy that you cannot date a congregant, and if you do get into any kind of relationship with a congregant, they are no longer your congregant. If you have a relationship with a congregant you can get in a lot of really serious trouble in most denominations.

Additionally, I don't like this automatic jump that polyamorous people would be more likely to be abusers, because abusive people are abusive people and they don't need the excuse of polyamory to be abusive. Abusive people are going to abuse, and they will hide it and they will do a lot of really nasty things. I've been around this world far too long to believe that any particular group is more likely to produce an abuser than another. They are in every type of people that you know. There are a lot more abusers than you think in this world.

To me, equating polyamory with a stronger likelihood of abuse is like the Catholic church saying that gay people can't be ordained into their priesthood, because they're more likely to be abusers. You have missed the entire point.

3. Are There Any Resources For Education?

Laura

So as a family law practitioner I can attest that monogamous relationships are *CRAY-ZEE!*

(laughter)

And that abusers are everywhere, and they are not going to be - you're not going to see them; they're hiding in plain sight, but they are definitely hiding.

What I need is information, because I understand that you guys have done a lot of work in deconstructing the whole foundations of monogamous relationships like the patriarchy, the ownership of women. I would really, if you have information specific to how - I know that you guys do a lot of talking and ethical searching ideally in polyamorous relationships, and I'd really like access to those documents, so that when I'm in private conversations I can say "This is how it's different. This is how they have thought about. This is what they address.", that kind of stuff. That would be really helpful, so send it my way!

Evan

There are *a ton* of books on polyamory.

That being said, I recognize that we're in a peculiar situation being in a religious space having this conversation, and so I, along with my partners, Coralee and Matthew, actually made a little booklet that we're calling "The Polyamory Primer" that explores the basics of polyamory from the perspective of a Community of Christ person with the goal of trying to dispel these misconceptions and trying to teach people a little bit about how polyamorous families operate.

It's VERY broad, and it's only like 20 pages. I'm not kidding when I say that people have their doctorates studying the nature of polyamorous families. This is a big conversation that's gonna take a while and a lot of studying and a lot of research, but I'm here for it because I care about this community and I'm willing to put blood, sweat, tears, and my entire soul into doing this. I feel like I kind of already have, but I will continue to do so.

(laughter)

So hit me up afterwards and I will get you a copy of that primer. I printed off like 15 of them to hand out here, so I'll give you one too. Primers for everyone!

(laughter)

Elle

Evan's favorite things...

(laughter)

4. We can learn a lot from the polyamorous community

Celeste

My name is Celeste. I'm actually not part of Community of Christ, but I moved away from the Brighamite church. I saw friends that were in lots of pain, yet [were] accepted by Community of Christ. I didn't think I'd ever think a church was a good thing again.

The reason I'm up here is because I fell in love with somebody that's neurodivergent. He has a very hard time. He's amazing to talk to when he *can* talk. I'm a person to process things; I have to talk. There's hours, sometimes days, when he can't interact. I was so sad that I couldn't get what I needed, but I still really love him, and like, there's a solution! I can still get what I need and I can still love him, and I didn't know this when I was a kid! I didn't know it was an option!

Evan

Yeah, there's no role models!

Celeste

And I don't know what's gonna happen. I don't know what it's gonna do for my life, but as I listen to some of the relationship advice from the polyamory community and I'm like, "Well, *this* needs to be taught! This is *really* healthy!" Like the way that people don't own each other.

That's another thing about my neurodivergent partner - he also happens to be blind, and he kind of experienced some of the discrimination, or the... as a woman there were several things I wasn't allowed to do - he allowed me to recover from patriarchy. It's a process still, but huge bounds and leaps.

That's what I wanted to say.

I'm curious if other people that are in polyamorous relationships in Community of Christ have found this same kind of thing. It changes the game with neurodivergence as far as relationships are concerned.

Elle

There are a lot of things to make a polyamorous relationship work, like any other relationship you need to have them. Communication, is a *huge one*, and I've communicated more in a polyamorous relationship than I ever have in my life. Communication and scheduling seem to be the two hardest things about being in a polyamorous relationship.

Polyamory taught me in a lot of ways that now that there are multiple people involved in all of this, that I have to be very open and frank about what I'm feeling and when I'm feeling it. You have to be a lot more intentional about relationships; you can't really take them for granted at any step of the way. These are things I think *every* relationship needs, whether it's monogamous or polyamorous. I think healthy communication is something that is *drilled* into polyamorous people, because it's such a major part of making these relationships work. There are a number of things that we can drive home about our relationships that might be helpful for a number of peoples' relationships.

Evan

So you mentioned that you don't have to have one partner to be *everything* for you. That's a lot of pressure to put on someone. With polyamory it's not that same sort of pressure for a lot of folks.

And of course, let me just say, because it's not self-evident to a lot of people: not everyone should be polyamorous.

(laughter)

These relationships are a lot of work; you talk about a lot of uncomfortable things that monogamous relationships often never talk about, like "How would you feel if I went on a date with this person?", "How would you feel if I kissed this person?", "How would you feel if I went home with this person?", "How would you feel if I spent the night with this person?" Those are conversations that monogamous people *never have*, and you have to be honest in those situations about how you're feeling.

It may not be exactly what you want or what your partner wants, but you gotta work together to work through those. Oftentimes it means that your relationship with your partner needs something or that you need something. A lot of people think that polyamorous folks are immune to jealousy.

(laughter)

Which is not the case. What I tend to see jealousy more as is like a gas gauge - "the tank's running low"; "I need something".

Like you said, there's just so many things that we could learn from the polyamorous community that the monogamous community could benefit from just the same. I've met couples who dated, got engaged, and got married without talking about if they wanted to have kids or not. Those are big questions! But it's pretty common in the polyamorous community to ask really uncomfortable questions right off the bat on the first date to see if how their relationship structure and what they're looking for is compatible with what you're looking for, because there's a lot of feelings involved and it's a lot better if we don't play this game of cat and mouse with emotions and [instead] speak like adults about our feelings.

Again, that being said: not for everybody.

Elle

Addressing the jealousy thing, because that's something I hear all the time, it is that it's this idea that polyamorous people have somehow conquered jealousy, which would be fun. I wish I had that power.

I also hear people say, "I think I'm too jealous to be in a polyamorous relationship", which might be the case. I wondered about that with myself, and once I was actually in a polyamorous relationship I realized that I wasn't jealous of the other individuals in my partner's life, and I realized the reason why I wasn't jealous of other individuals was because my relationship with him was unique. No one else would ever be to me what he was, and no one could replace what I was to him. We got different things from different people. Just like parents have a different relationship with each of their kids it doesn't mean they love any of their kids less; it means they have a different relationship with them.

That said, jealousy does happen, and usually the jealousy is more circumstantial than anything, like "This was supposed to be something that we did, and it didn't end up happening" or things along that nature. But I don't tend to get jealous of other partners and who they are to my partner.

Evan

One of the best things about being polyamorous for me is seeing my wife be twitterpatted, and have her just be in love and all gushy! It's so cute to see!

It's also really funny, because with polyamory if you have a type it *really* comes out.

(laughter)

It's funny to see!

I know we're wrapping up here, but I did want to touch on "You don't have to be the one thing for everybody". I really like artificial intelligence and how it's affecting society, and my wife doesn't *really* care. She's like, "Oh that's... nice?"

(laughter)

But my partner Matthew is like, "Holy cow! Did you read about this new A.I. model?? And they're gonna do this, and this, and this, and they can do this and this", and I'm like "Holy cow! I didn't know anything about that! Did you know this, this, this, and this?" And so I can connect with Matthew on that level, whereas I can't really with Coralee, which is fine! It's boring when you have a mirror of yourself as a partner.

It's a big conversation we're having, and it's gonna take a long time to have it, but I'm here to keep having it! Anybody! Literally anybody who wants to have this conversation with me: I'm willing to have it. It's gonna be uncomfortable for me, and I know that, and I'm gonna try to swallow that so that we can push through it, but it's important to me because my family is important to me. I'm willing to swallow all of this uncomfortableness because I *LOVE* them; they are *THE* most important people in my life. I'm willing to power through this *because* I love them.