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Gay man faces LDS excommunication over marriage

By Jennifer Dobner

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — A gay man who is a lifetime member of the LDS Church could be facing disciplinary action and excommunication after legally marrying his partner in Canada.

Buckley Jeppson, 57, said he's been informed verbally that his life is incompatible with the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and that a disciplinary council will address the matter.

Jeppson, of Washington, D.C., married Mike Kessler in Toronto on Aug. 27, 2004.

It is believed that if Jeppson is excommunicated, it would be the first time a Latter-day Saint in a legal same-sex marriage would be punished by the church, said Olin Thomas, executive director of Affirmation, an advocacy and education group for gay Latter-day Saints.

Jeppson said that over the past five months Nolan Archibald, the senior leader over a group of LDS congregations in the Washington, D.C., area, has encouraged him to resign his church membership, which would avoid disciplinary action.

Jeppson is not willing to do that.

"It's not going to be my choice to deny my heritage and my faith," Jeppson said in a telephone interview from his home.

Contacted by The Associated Press, Archibald declined specific comment, saying he has a sacred duty to keep matters involving church members confidential.

"I would like to say, it's a total misrepresentation of the conversation we had," Archibald said.

The LDS church only recognizes marriage between a man and a woman, Salt Lake City-based church spokeswoman Kim Farah said. Where other forms of marriage are legal, only those in heterosexual marriages could be members of the church, she said.

Baptized church members promise to live the principles of the gospel, Farah said.

"If the person later decides to reject these core principles, they have the right and freedom to do so," she said. "However, they cannot reasonably expect to reject the most fundamental teachings of the church and still wrap themselves in the cloak of church membership. Of course, they would be welcome to continue to attend church services."

Thomas believes this issue is an important one for the church to address.

Thomas said, "The church's position has been that they really didn't have anything against gays, although everyone had to obey church rules to not have sex outside of marriage. But now many countries are allowing legal same-sex marriage. What are they going to do in all of those countries where they are sending missionaries?"

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