



In this May 2014 file photo, John Dehlin sits in his basement studio where he broadcasts his podcast at his home in North Logan, Utah.

Mormon who runs website for faith questions faces discipline

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — A lifelong Mormon well-known for running a website that provides a forum for church members questioning their faith said Thursday he is set to be kicked out of the religion.

John Dehlin of Logan said a regional church leader informed him Wednesday night that a disciplinary hearing is scheduled for Jan. 25, at which Dehlin is likely to be censured or excommunicated.

Excommunication is rare and amounts to the harshest punishment available for a church member.

Dehlin said he was told last year that his website Mormonstories.org and his public support of same-sex marriage were reasons he is being accused of apostasy, defined by the church as "repeatedly acting in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the church or its faithful leaders, or persisting, after receiving counsel, in teaching false doctrine."

Dehlin has released letters from the church leader that were given to him in August and this month. The letters focus on Dehlin's questioning of key church doctrine, the forum he provides via the website for doubters, and him becoming an ordained minister in another faith.

The documents do not mention his support for gay marriage.

Dehlin says he would like to remain a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but won't

give up the website or pull back his support for gays and lesbians. He has faced church discipline multiple times over the past decade.

"I still love the church, I still love Mormonism," Dehlin said. "But I would certainly rather be excommunicated than violate my conscience."

Officials with the Salt Lake City-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints said in a statement they won't discuss Dehlin's case out of privacy concerns.

Spokesman Eric Hawkins said in a statement that church leaders have clearly spelled out the reasons for the discipline in letters to Dehlin, leaving it up to Dehlin to release the documents.

The latest letter, dated Jan. 8 from regional church leader Bryan King, is only three paragraphs long and says that after carefully weighing activity on Dehlin's social media sites, King decided to convene the upcoming disciplinary council. He invited Dehlin to participate and bring witnesses and other evidence for his case.

A previous letter from August shows King calling on Dehlin to apologize for false statements he has made about God, Jesus Christ and the Book of Mormon. It also asks him to stop running the forum for people to criticize the church and refrain from promoting groups that push doctrines contrary to Mormon beliefs.

Dehlin said King and another church leader have verbally mentioned his support

of gay rights and the group Ordain Women as reasons for concern, even though they are not in the letters.

Dehlin's hearing comes seven months after the church excommunicated Kate Kelly, founder of Ordain Women, a prominent Mormon women's group that staged demonstrations in a push for women to be allowed to join the faith's lay clergy.

That move sent ripples throughout Mormon communities around the country and was described by scholars as boundary maintenance and a warning to others.

Scholars say Kelly and Dehlin are the most high-profile examples of excommunication proceedings since 1993, when the church disciplined Mormon writers who questioned church doctrine, ousting five and temporarily kicking out a sixth person.

Duke nixes plan to use chapel for Muslim call to prayer

DURHAM, N.C. (AP) — Days after announcing that a Muslim call to prayer would echo from its historic chapel tower, Duke University changed course Thursday following a flurry of calls and emails objecting to the plan.

Instead, Muslims will gather for their call to prayer in a grassy area near the 210-foot gothic tower before heading into a room in Duke Chapel for their weekly prayer service. The university had previously said a moderately amplified call to prayer would be read by members of the Muslim Students Association from the tower for about three minutes each Friday.

Michael Schoenfeld, Duke's vice president for public affairs and government relations, said it would be up to the students if they want to use some sort of amplification.

The original plan drew the ire of evangelist Franklin Graham, who urged Duke alumni to withhold support because of violence against Christians that he attributed to Muslims. Schoenfeld said emails and calls came from alumni and others.

"There was considerable traffic and conversation and even a little bit of confusion, both within the campus and certainly outside, about what Duke was doing," Schoenfeld said. "The purposes and goals and even the facts had been so mischaracterized as to turn it into a divisive situation, not a unifying situation."

He also said there were concerns about safety and security, but he declined to elaborate on whether any



This Jan. 15 photo shows Duke Chapel in Durham, N.C. On Thursday, just days after announcing that a traditional Muslim call to prayer would echo from the historic chapel tower, Duke University changed course after being bombarded with calls and emails objecting to the plan.

specific threats had been received.

Graham, the son of the Rev. Billy Graham, wrote later in the day that the university made the right decision to cancel the plan to use the tower. However, Schoenfeld said the reversal was not due to Graham's opposition.

Shalini Subbarao, 19, a sophomore from St. Louis, said she was disappointed with the school's reversal as she walked past the chapel.

"I thought it was really progressive. It showed our openness to other religions," she said of the original plan.

Ios Kotaogiannis, a 39-year-old doctoral candidate in computer science who is from Greece, said he was glad officials reversed their decision.

"I'm a secular person. I'm not against religion. I think religion is good. But it has its place — inside the chapel," he said.

The chapel is identified by the school as a Christian church but also hosts Hindu services and has been used for Buddhist meditations.

The chapel's associate dean for religious life, Christy Lohr Sapp, said before the plans were canceled that the move showed the school's commitment to religious pluralism. In a column written for *The News & Observer* of Raleigh, Lohr Sapp acknowledged the headlines generated by violence by extremists in ISIS, Boko Haram and al-Qaida, contrasting it to what's happening on campus.

"Yet, at Duke University, the Muslim community represents a strikingly different face of Islam than is seen on the nightly news: one that is peaceful and prayerful," she wrote.

The university says more than 700 of its students are Muslim, Schoenfeld said.

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