

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
THE SEVENTY
47 EAST SOUTH TEMPLE STREET, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH 84150-1700

November 6, 2008

Mr. Ernest Michel
American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust
Survivors and their Descendants
122 West 30th Street, Suite 205
New York NY 10001

Dear Ernie:

We are writing at the request of Elder Dallin H. Oaks, and on behalf of the other Church representatives with whom you and your associates met on Monday. We thank you for the courteous way we were received. We felt once again that as people of good will we can discuss our differences in an atmosphere of trust, honesty, and candor.

While we think it was clear to everyone, as Stuart Eizenstat noted, that we are not going to agree on matters of theology, we each recognize the 1995 Memorandum of Understanding as the common ground of our accord. What remains is to develop a mechanism to facilitate that mutual understanding by monitoring progress.

At the outset, we reaffirm a matter Elder Oaks addressed pointedly at the end. More than once during the meeting we heard concerns that we have acted disrespectfully toward Holocaust victims and their families by virtue of our work for the dead. As Elder Oaks said, we are pained by this perception. We believe there is no faith group outside of Judaism itself that nurtures a deeper or more cordial feeling toward the people of Judah—God's Covenant People—than we do. The enormity of the crimes perpetrated against Jews for centuries, culminating in the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust, are unparalleled in the history of man's inhumanity to man. It was this very uniqueness that persuaded our Church leaders nearly a decade and a half ago to make the accommodations reflected in the 1995 Memorandum.

We believe that we appreciate, as much as non-Jews can, the pain that Jews still suffer as a result of the Holocaust. Sadly, that pain can be intensified when some represent our doctrines and practices as something they are not. It greatly distorts the true intent of our doctrines and religious practices when it is said that our temple work changes the “Jewishness” of a person or that it somehow affects his ethnicity or visits upon him something that detracts from the significance of his life or the way he died. *Once again we reaffirm to you that our temple and family history work does none of these things.* Such characterizations are someone else’s ideas, not ours, and we believe that we—and only we—are in a position to declare what our doctrines and beliefs are—and more to the point—what they are not.

As Elder Oaks explained in our meeting, the effect of a baptism by proxy or any other ordinance for the dead is to make an offer, which the individual may choose to accept. If not accepted, the ordinance is of no effect.

New FamilySearch. We turn now to an issue we have raised before that we gave additional emphasis in our discussions. The computer system being used by Church members when the 1995 Memorandum of Understanding was created is being phased out and replaced by a new system that embodies a new approach for our members to manage their family history and temple work. This new development will have a direct and beneficial impact on your concerns regarding Jewish Holocaust victims.

The new FamilySearch system, which we have been developing for six years and are currently implementing in phases around the world, focuses on individual family name submissions. Through its very structure it discourages the submission of large lists of unrelated individuals. The data in the system is lineage-linked to accurately reflect individuals within the context of their family relationships and to help users screen out duplicate names so that the same individuals are not submitted twice. It also separates the process of submitting names for temple ordinances from the process of submitting names purely for genealogical purposes. The names of any Holocaust victims we can identify in the database are to be flagged with a special designation—“not available for temple ordinances.” A family member wishing to submit the name of an ancestor who died in the Holocaust would need to comply with the requirements of the 1995 Memorandum before such ordinances could be performed.

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Joint Monitoring. We agreed three and a half years ago to a committee of persons concerned with this issue who could meet as needed to review progress, identify possible violations of our policies, and issue a written report. This committee actually met soon after our April 2005 meeting and satisfactorily resolved most issues relating to some 5,300 names you brought with you to that meeting. However, the committee has not met to address new concerns since that time.

We feel that a revitalized committee could meet more often to resolve allegations of violations of our understanding and report its conclusions to all parties. We suggest that we jointly review the membership of such a committee and establish a more regular meeting and reporting structure so that resolution of new issues can bring us closer together and achieve the mutual understanding and trust we both desire. Such a revitalized committee would have the additional benefit of dramatically reducing the influence of any who may seek to plant the seeds of suspicion and discord that would interfere with the warm and cordial relationship that both of us desire.

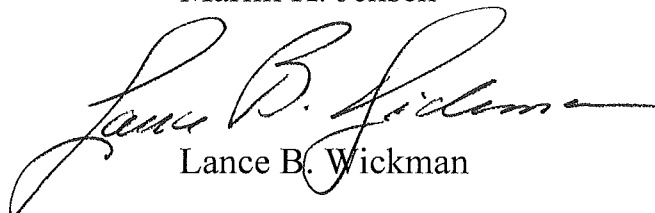
We conclude where we began—with a sincere expression of appreciation for our meeting on Monday. All of us here hope that our many years of discussion will finally lead to a lasting peace between us on this important matter.

With warmest personal regards,

Sincerely,



Marlin K. Jensen



Lance B. Wickman

cc: Mr. Stuart Eizenstat