

Elder Todd B. Hansen and Elder Taniela B. Kakolo of the Seventy set apart our new Willow Creek Stake's presidency in 2018.



A recent blunder with a Sunday school manual for use by all members of the Church of Jesus Christ of latter-day Saints could set back progress the Utah-based faith has made on the issue of racism in the past few years and alienate people of color.

Last year, the church produced a new manual for its 2020 curriculum, which will be a study of the faith's signature, scripture, the Book of Mormon which tells the religious history of peoples in the Ancient Americas.

Several passages describe a "dark skin" descending on one of the clans, and for much of the faith's history that has been seen as a racial "curse." These days, though, that interpretations is no longer part of church teaching.

That is why several early readers of the 2020 "Come Follow Me" manual were troubled to see a note in one lesson that is a throwback to previous thinking, "The dark skin was placed upon the Lamanites so that they could be distinguished from the Nephites and to keep the two peoples from mixing," the book explains. . .

By the time this passage came to the church's attention, the manuals had been printed. Church spokeswoman Irene Caso explained, "During the publication of the 'Come, Follow Me' manual for 2020, there was an error that resulted in the printing of material that doesn't reflect the church's current views on the topic," she said. . . These days the church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, of that it reflects unrighteous actions in a premortal life. . .

The online manual says that “the curse of the Lamanites was that they were ‘cut off from the Lord’s presence. Because of their iniquity. . . When they later embraced the gospel the curse did no more follow them. . .” The manuals should have been shredded when this egregious error was found prior to international distribution,” said Jerri Harwell, associate professor in S.L. Community College’s English Department. . . The ramifications of this printing will have far-reaching and perhaps eternal consequences to the souls of man,” the African American teacher said. “It saddens me that although the brethren may denounce racism, racist acts, and racist thoughts, . . . a manual that expounds racial gospel teaching has gone out to all 16 million members. . . the Genesis group for black Latter-day Saints, has worked tirelessly to get such teaching removed from book shelves, and now it has been sent out under the church’s name. . .

Patrick Mason, head of Mormon studies at Utah State University, also sees inconsistency in how members and church department handle questions of race “It’s a big church and not everybody is on the same page,” Mason said. “The people writing curriculum for the church were socialized at a different time in a different church, when the conservatives were authoritative voices. The inclusion of an old quote from Joseph Fielding Smith “disappoints but doesn’t surprise me,” the scholar said, given what we know about entrenched conservatism of curriculum writers within the church. The “silver lining” is that church leaders did change it, he said, “and did it quickly.” **Salt Lake Tribune January, 18, 2020 article entitled “Curse error in Sunday school manual revives criticism against LDS Church on Race,”**