

COPY

March 24, 1998

Ms. Norma Cantu  
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
United States Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Cantu:

Subject: Request for Religious Exemption from Title IX Regulation: 34 CFR § 106.21  
(Admissions) and 34 CFR § 106.23 (Recruitment)

The purpose of this letter is to provide the United States Department of Education with official notification that Ricks College, located in Rexburg, Idaho, (hereinafter referred to as "Ricks" or the "College") considers itself exempt from the application of 34 CFR § 106.21 and 34 CFR § 106.23, to the extent described in this correspondence, which regulations are also published pursuant to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 USC § 1681 et. seq., a federal statute prohibiting sex discrimination in educational programs. Ricks expressly requests the Department to recognize formally that Ricks is exempt from the application of these sections because their provisions are in conflict with religious teachings, tenets, and practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereinafter sometimes referred to as the "Church" or the "LDS Church"), a religious organization which sponsors and controls Ricks.

In 1985 your office granted other Ricks requests for exemption from other sections of 34 CFR. Specifically, the College was ". . . exempted from the requirements of the following sections of the Title IX regulations: 34 CFR §§ 106.21, 106.31, 106.32, 106.36, 106.39, 106.40, and 106.57." (The exemption with reference to 106.21 concerned prohibitions relating to marital or parental status.) The basis for these exemptions was ". . . that Ricks College is controlled by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in that Ricks College practices the tenets of the Church and is owned and operated by the Church. This relationship between the Church and the College adequately establishes that Ricks College is controlled by a religious organization as is required for consideration for exemption under § 106.12 of the Title IX regulations." (Correspondence of June 24, 1985, from Harry M. Singleton, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, United States Department of Education to Dr. Bruce C. Hafen, president of Ricks College.)

Ms. Norma Cantu

March 24, 1998

Page 2

In our application letter of May 7, 1985, we noted, in part, that the Church originally created the College in 1888 and since that time the Church has been continuously and ultimately responsible for the College's operation. The College's Board of Trustees consists of persons appointed by the governing board of the Church. The majority of the College's operating budget is derived from appropriations from the Church.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a major international Christian religion, having a fully developed theology, a well-known history spanning nearly two centuries, and a worldwide membership presently numbering approximately ten million. Its members believe that the Church and its doctrine contain the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, restored by direct revelation from God to Joseph Smith, who was called as a prophet in the Biblical sense in 1820. The governing Board of the Church consists of a First Presidency of three, along with a Quorum of Twelve Apostles, all of whom are regarded by the Church membership as apostles and prophets. While accepting the King James Version of the Bible as holy scripture, the Church also regards the Book of Mormon as another testament of Christ and as holy scripture. In addition, the Church also accepts prophetic writings as scripture and regards the teachings of current Church leaders as religious doctrine.

Within this general framework, and with specific reference to this request for an exemption, the Church teaches that marriage between a man and a woman and the family unit are of basic theological significance. Thus, the Church teaches that certain distinctions based on gender, particularly as they relate to matters of family life, are both natural and religiously significant. At the same time, the Church has a remarkable record of encouraging all of its members, male and female, to obtain as much education as possible and to participate fully in the communities in which they live.

Attached hereto as Exhibit A is a copy of an official pronouncement of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints dated September 23, 1995. This "Proclamation on the Family" makes the position of the Church with respect to the matters addressed in it abundantly clear and reaffirms certain beliefs concerning marriage and the family to be principles of Church doctrine, which are binding on the Church, its controlled organizations, like Ricks College, and the Church membership.

In order to promote marriage and family as religious values, Ricks College seeks to maintain an appropriate balance of males and females in its student body. It is believed that a more gender balanced and proportional student body is critical to allow for healthy social interaction between males and females, which is conducive to marriage and family, and to promote a healthy balance between the genders in the composition of College ecclesiastical units and congregations. Accordingly, Ricks seeks to prefer males over females or females over males

Ms. Norma Cantu  
March 24, 1998  
Page 3

as circumstances dictate in an attempt to achieve enhanced gender equity and the optimal environment for promoting the religious values of marriage and family at the College.

College efforts to reach an appropriate gender balance, however, may come into conflict with the gender neutral provisions of Sections 106.21 and 106.23. Accordingly, Ricks College requests that an exemption be granted to it from 106.21 and 106.23 of the Title IX regulations to allow it to give preferential treatment on the basis of gender in admissions and recruitment to support its religious value of promoting marriage and family.

The College is a distinctive, religiously based institution with a serious commitment to the values, doctrines, and mission of its sponsoring Church at the heart of its educational mission. Your prompt attention in evaluating this notice will be greatly appreciated. If I, or any members of the College administration, can be of any assistance to you in completing your review, or if you require additional information, please contact me.

Sincerely,

David A. Bednar  
President

DAB/bao

bpc: Michael R. Orme

Attachment: Proclamation on the Family

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