

Transcend 2005 - December

Transcend for Latter-day Saints

*Edifying Latter-day Saint Elected Officials,
Community Leaders, and Active Citizens*

The Ultimate Basis for Lasting Solutions

Part 2 of 2

Session Nine, December 2005

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(Sutherland Note: *The theme of the December session of the 2005 Transcend Series was “The Quest for Lasting Solutions: Applying Core Principles.” Third, and last, among the Process sessions this year, the December session addressed the ultimate question of the possibility of lasting solutions to community problems. Is there a basis upon which we can find lasting solutions?*

The breakfast keynote was delivered by the Honorable Peter Corroon, Mayor of Salt Lake County. Mayor Corroon provided an overview of his priorities and insights into how he has chosen to govern following a previously scandal-ridden administration.

The morning seminar discussion was led by Sutherland associate and attorney Bill Duncan who asked participants to consider a variety of political philosophies on the road to lasting solutions. And the afternoon workshop was led by Sutherland Institute Senior Vice-President, and Transcend Series coordinator, Stan Rasmussen. Mr. Rasmussen continued the theme of the day by helping participants flesh out how we create our values and priorities that begin the process of addressing lasting solutions.

Perhaps most surprising from the day was that several participants were not convinced that lasting solutions are possible – politics being too volatile, too complicated, and too personal. The Sutherland Institute, of course, feels differently. We exist to try to find lasting solutions and we are convinced that we can find them if we have the courage as a people to establish core principles, determine community values and priorities, and, maybe most important of all, remember we are only human as we move through our democratic processes. – Paul T. Mero, president, Sutherland Institute)

The Ultimate Basis for Lasting Solutions

Part 2 of 2

“We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.” – The Family: A Proclamation to the World, The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, September 23, 1995.

Why do Latter-day Saints believe that the family is the fundamental unit of society? What is it about the family that warrants this distinction? And are there good secular reasons for LDS elected officials and community leaders to promote it thusly?

Where you end up is often a function of which way you face. This is particularly true as it pertains to finding lasting solutions to community problems. The way

you face, in public policy terms, is another way of describing your choice for “fundamental unit of society.” You have five choices – the individual, the family, the church, the corporation, and the state.

There are several preliminary considerations. Each choice carries with it a chosen path or direction that will lead you to ultimate destinations, some of which might not be desirable. You must consider the realities of each choice regarding such aspects as social, cultural, political, economic, and spiritual. For instance, placing the individual as the fundamental unit of society might seem helpful if we are considering how it plays economically. But culturally, where a society based on the individual would lean toward narcissism, this choice might be undesirable.

Basing society on the church might be appealing from a cultural standpoint, but unappealing politically in the form of a theocracy. A corporate choice might work well as it pertains to the profit motive, but poorly as it relates socially, and so on.

We are often tempted, consciously or not, to mix and mingle each choice to optimize our efforts. Sounds right, doesn't it, that we would only want to take the best from each to create the best foundation for society? The problem with this eclectic strategy is that all too often the best from each conflict. The best of the individual as the fundamental unit of society could be described as the “invisible hand” of the marketplace. Yet the best of the church as the fundamental unit might be its organized, cooperative nature. Frankly, as hard as we try to compartmentalize each based on their respective strengths, the two are simply incompatible. Conflict would result, not lasting solutions. The same could be said about the corporation and the state, or any other combination.

Please review the accompanying chart. I have tried to accurately and objectively represent each challenger for the crown. At the very least, perhaps the matrix will provide a starting point as you consider where you stand, or how you can improve on this matrix.

At the Sutherland Institute, and for some of us personally as Latter-day Saints, we have chosen the family as the fundamental unit of society. We feel that on all counts the family best serves the private and public interests of society. That is, we feel that lasting solutions are best achieved through the roles and functions of the family – that small, autonomous groups of people best serve our sociality, that family traditions and generational bonding create wholesome and disciplined culture, that family autonomy blesses democratic processes, that a family's cooperative and altruistic nature establish valuable domestic economies without burdening free markets, and, spiritually, the family is a repository of stewardships and service.

As you ponder your political and philosophical foundations, we hope this analysis helps. Furthermore, we hope that the nine-month series of “LDS Transcend” has been thought-provoking for you. Good luck in the new year. –
PTM.