

# Students Discuss Religious Beliefs

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The sanctuary of the Salt Lake Christian Center was filled with students as a film played, marking the beginning of the 2007 National Student Dialogue Conference.

The film showed two LDS missionaries knocking on the door of an evangelical woman's home. As she opened the door the missionaries introduced themselves and explained that they had a message to share. She said that she was evangelical and that she already had a relationship with Jesus Christ and believed in his saving grace.

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Evangelicals met in a conference Friday to foster dialogue among the two faiths.

Standing Together Ministries, founded by Rev. Greg Johnson, hosted the conference in conjunction with the Salt Lake Theological Seminary.

"It blows me away we can be candid and build these kinds of relationships," Johnson said. Organizers of the conference used dialogue as a way to setup the conference. Participants were encouraged to talk to each other with what organizers called "convicted civility" rather than to talk in "absolutes," as the missionaries and the woman in the film had.

Six students of various faiths and a moderator sat together and asked religious questions such as the difference in the nature of God and their faith's definition of trinity.

"I've learned the difference between truth and myth," said Dana Dill, an evangelical attending Biola University in California. It's a time when both sides can come together without the worry, but with gentleness and humbleness and still stick with our beliefs."

As students discussed their different faiths they found that while they had a lot in common, the differences were usually more important.

"The hair-splitting isn't necessarily hair-splitting," Dill said. "These are deep convictions." BYU students Aaron Christensen, 19, and Kelsey Jones, 18 enjoyed the atmosphere of the conference.

"We loved it." Jones said. "It's cool to meet people of other religions that are as sincere as we are."

Christensen stayed longer than she expected to for enjoying it so much.

"We were going to stay for just the first session, but the spirit of friendship was so strong we decided to stay," Christensen said.

The conference also had five plenary sessions each with a well-known LDS and Evangelical speaker. After the formal lectures, the speakers had a 30-minute conversation, and then students asked questions of the speakers.

"I think one thing this does is it forces you to ask yourself what is it you believe that is unique and is it exclusive," said speaker Doug McConnell, academic dean of the Fuller Seminary. Another speaker, Robert Millet from BYU, had a similar comment.

"It's all based upon the premise, 'I can learn something from someone that's not of my faith,'" he said.

Many students found that the conference was a good way to learn the truth about each others religions and would attend again next year.

"I would recommend this to every Christian and Latter-day Saint because there are so many miscommunications and errors," said Megan Falese, an Evangelical from Pikes Peaks Community College in Colorado.