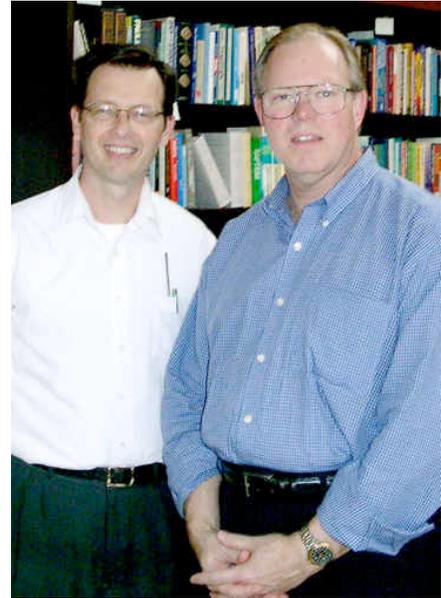


Paul Trask Interview by the Worldwide Church of God

In March, 2003, Paul Trask met with three leaders of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG), headquartered in Pasadena, California. The WCG was founded by Herbert W. Armstrong, and revolved around his personal interpretation of Sabbatarianism, and a variety of other legalistic doctrines. Armstrong's death in 1986 freed the church's surviving leadership to begin examining their cultic doctrinal positions in the light of Biblical truth. Over the following nine years, the WCG shed itself of Armstrong's heretical teachings in favor of Biblical Christian doctrine. As a result, the WCG is no longer considered a psuedo-Christian cult, but has joined mainstream, genuine Christianity. The WCG has since changed its name to Grace Communion International.



Paul Trask (R), with
Michael Morrison (WCG-L)

The WCG asked if they could publish an interview with Paul in their May 2003 issue of The Worldwide Church of God News (WN). The content of this interview follows below.

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### **“Former RLDS minister helps free others from heresy of Mormonism”**

*Paul Trask, a former minister in the Reorganized Latter Day Saint church (RLDS), met with J. Michael Fezell and Michael Morrison, March 10. Following is a WN interview with Mr. Trask.*

#### **WN: What is your background with the RLDS?**

**Paul Trask:** I joined the RLDS church shortly after my wife, Leslie, and I were married in 1970. We were both 19 at the time. Before that I was a Baptist.

I joined the RLDS church in relative ignorance of its real theology. I had not yet read the Book of Mormon. I later became active in the church after we had been married about three years. This happened after I was forgiven by the Lord for living a sinful life during my final college years.

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After six months of high activity I was "called" to the RLDS Aaronic priesthood as a priest. A year after that I was called to be an elder in their Melchisedek priesthood and asked to be the pastor of their San Francisco, California, congregation.

After my tenure as pastor I was asked to be a counselor to the bishop of the San Francisco Bay Stake. I resigned this position, however, when I realized that most of my formal activity was not very spiritually oriented.

My wife and I went on to be active in RLDS congregations in Michigan and Texas before we moved to Independence, Missouri, where the RLDS church is headquartered.

Shortly after our arrival in Independence, the church experienced a major split over liberal vs. fundamental issues. Our family joined a large number of other fundamental RLDS members by meeting independently, outside the auspices of RLDS leadership.

I went on to be the pastor of the largest of these independent groups in Independence. It was while I was pastor of this independent group that my wife and I finished some of our most troubling research and soul-searching. In anguish, I resigned my position as pastor, and our family left the RLDS church in January 1989, never to return.

#### **WN: What led you to leave?**

**Paul Trask:** Our family left the RLDS church as we lost faith in Joseph Smith as a prophet of God and in the reliability of his scriptures and doctrines. These are the foundations upon which our faith in the RLDS church was built. Without these fundamental pillars in place, the whole idea of the RLDS church became completely untenable.

I became gravely concerned that we had not only been deceived ourselves, but as a priesthood member and pastor, I had taught countless other people the same deceptions that I had fallen for. I deeply feared that I was seriously misrepresenting the God I loved and thought I was serving so diligently. I felt we were in a house that was on fire; we escaped as quickly as possible.

#### **WN: When did you begin to doubt your beliefs?**

**Paul Trask:** In 1983 we became aware that one of Joseph Smith's books of scripture, the Doctrine & Covenants, had been substantially altered from its original form. I studied this problem carefully and actually conformed my personal copy of this book to the original documents. My goal at this time was to be more "pure" in my personal belief and practice.

I shared my discovery with others as well, with the thought of ultimately reforming the RLDS church back to these original pronouncements. But as I studied the altered documents over the years, it became apparent that we would never really be able to "put Humpty Dumpty back together again"; the damage was too extensive.

Current church structure and practice had been based on the altered documents since 1835. Plus, I encountered major resistance among church members to the whole idea of the Doctrine & Covenants having been altered. Many members simply could not entertain the notion. It was far too much of a stretch for them.

And then in the spring of 1988 I lent some material to a friend of ours written by one of the early church leaders. It exposed and explained some of the mistakes that had been made early in the church's history, including the alteration of the Doctrine & Covenants.

Our friend had been questioning the church himself, even before reading this material. After he read it, he and his family left the church. I was shocked and flabbergasted. My friend then began giving me things to read, but I told him I was having a hard time being a pastor and reading all of those things!

Soon after this, however, my wife and I for the first time began a critical examination of the Book of Mormon. I expected it to hold up under scrutiny much better than it did. Before long we had discovered a number of major problems for which there did not seem to be any rational answer, except for one: that the Book of Mormon was a fraud.

### **WN: What is the difference between Mormons and the Reorganized Latter Day Saint church?**

**Paul Trask:** The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was originally comprised of Mormons who elected not to follow Brigham Young from Nauvoo, Illinois, to Utah in 1846. They refused to follow Brigham Young for two primary reasons. First, they rejected polygamy, which Brigham Young was still promoting. And second, they strongly believed that Joseph Smith had designated his son, Joseph Smith III, to be his lawful successor as president of the church.

Many of these people stayed behind, and became scattered throughout the Midwest. In the early 1850s a group of these independent congregations came together as a loose "Reorganization." Although initially reticent, Joseph Smith III finally accepted the invitation of this group (which claimed to be a reorganization of his father's original church) and became their president in 1860.

His mother joined this Reorganization with him. The RLDS church rejected not only polygamy as an unacceptable doctrine, but also a number of other doctrines and practices introduced during the Nauvoo era, such as baptism for the dead, eternal progression and secret temple ceremonies.

Notable factors that set the RLDS church apart from Utah Mormonism are (1) they have continuously had a direct descendant of Joseph Smith as their president (until 1996), (2) Joseph Smith's widow, Emma Bidamon, joined with them, (3) they own and publish Joseph Smith's revision of the Bible, the Inspired Version, (4) they were awarded the Kirtland Temple, where a court declared them the legal continuation of Joseph Smith's

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original church and (5) they are headquartered in Joseph Smith's city of Zion—Independence, Missouri—where they completed building their own temple in 1994.

For the past 40 years, however, RLDS leaders have endeavored to move the church gradually away from Latter Day Saint doctrine and identity, while secretly endeavoring to gain acceptance by mainstream Christian leaders. They are doing this while still claiming a belief in Joseph Smith's spurious scriptures and un-Christian priesthood structure.

In contrast, the genuine gospel of Jesus Christ is still neither understood nor promoted. Beginning in 1984 a number of fundamentalist groups broke away from the RLDS church over these doctrinal issues, most of which have now incorporated as independent churches.

Unshackled by this fundamentalist movement, the surviving RLDS church has become increasingly liberal. Whereas Joseph Smith claimed for his church exclusive truth and authority, today's RLDS church now openly promotes religious pluralism.

Pluralism wrongly teaches that God authored and is at work in all of the world's religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, and that salvation can be found in them all. Pluralism also promotes dialogue among the world's religions in order to create a high level of tolerance and respect for each other's religious heritage.

It is in this sense that today's RLDS leadership continues to identify with the religious heritage left them by Joseph Smith. They no longer claim this heritage as authoritative—as Joseph Smith did. Rather, they claim it as their own unique contribution to the religious fabric of the world, of which they so desperately want to be a part.

This is in stark contrast with their own history, and with Utah Mormonism, which still maintains a firm belief in Joseph Smith and his founding doctrines, including the exclusive authority to represent God on earth.

**WN: Tell us about your ministry with RLDS. How did it get started? What prompted you? Why do you believe God is leading you to reach out to RLDS?**

**Paul Trask:** When I first left the RLDS church, I just wanted to get it behind me. Yet I still had a love for God, and felt he had called me to ministry. I knew that I had been deceived, and wanted to know the truth about God. So I enrolled in Fuller Seminary in Pasadena. Our family moved to Pasadena, feeling that we would never return to Missouri.

The program at Fuller was so intense that I did not have much time to look back at Joseph Smith, which was just fine with me. After I graduated from Fuller, I was seeking the Lord's will for myself, and direction for our family.

During this time, my son, Nathaniel, felt that one Sunday sermon was directed at me, that I should use my talents to address the RLDS issue. I was surprised at his response, but continued to ponder if he was right.

Around this time, during my morning devotions, I came across the following passage in Hebrews 7:11: "If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?"

This passage started a flood of thoughts about Joseph Smith's priesthood system, and was the genesis for a book I ultimately wrote entitled *Part Way to Utah: the Forgotten Mormons*. A number of other things also began falling into line, and our family decided to return to Independence, Missouri.

While I had entertained the idea of writing a book about the RLDS church, I felt I needed some definite confirmation from the Lord before taking on such a large undertaking. My wife and I prayed one morning for such confirmation.

Later that same day the confirmation came in a most unexpected way. I discussed this confirmation with my wife, and we agreed that I needed to start on the book. I really had no idea how my book would be received, so I started small by printing only 250 copies when it was completed.

These copies were either sold or spoken for before they were ready to be picked up. So I then decided to print a much larger run. Shortly thereafter, the Independence newspaper, the *Independence Examiner*, ran a story about my book and me. I also did a book signing and got a few bookstores to carry my book. My book was now off and running.

I also taught six chapters of my book on the RLDS priesthood system at a Baptist church, which is supportive of my ministry. To my delight, my book was beginning to have an impact. People were leaving the RLDS church in favor of genuine Christianity. I continue to be thrilled each and every time I get word of someone leaving the deception of Joseph Smith and coming to the Lord by reading my book.

In early 2000 I felt the Lord prompting me to start a website to minister to the RLDS. My brother-in-law and I made some movement in that direction, but it was not ultimately successful. In early 2001 I had some downtime from my consulting work. During this time the Lord impressed upon me again, in the middle of the night, the need to start a website. His prompting was gentle, but firm.

The next day I went out and bought the necessary software. I spent the next two days going through the tutorial to learn how to use it. I then started constructing a website. Within a few weeks I had a website up and running. You can access it at [www.help4rlds.com](http://www.help4rlds.com).

In the past two years I have seen traffic steadily increase on the website, and I continue to answer numerous e-mails from people who visit the site and have questions or just want to vent their anger at me! I continue to get feedback that the website has filled a void in ministry to the RLDS.

Ministry to the RLDS is not something I ever aspired to. My book came first, and then the website. I sometimes have to pinch myself and acknowledge that I indeed have a ministry going on here. I am gratified as I see people being set free from Joseph Smith.

I know that the Lord is reaching people through the work he has led me to do. And if he wants to bear fruit for himself through my efforts, then I am thrilled to be a part of it.

I am privileged to use the knowledge and information the Lord has provided me to benefit others who are still ensnared in Joseph Smith. I have to be honest, that I was quite an unwilling messenger at first. But the Lord has inspired me to keep with it as I see souls being liberated.

**WN: What interested you about the WCG's journey?**

**Paul Trask:** A while back I picked up a copy of Mike Feazell's book, *The Liberation of the Worldwide Church of God*, at a Christian bookstore. As I began reading it, I couldn't resist underlining certain passages that were reminiscent of my own mindset while I was in the RLDS, and of my awakening process as I began discovering how wrong it was.

I finally had to stop underlining, because I got to the point where I was practically underlining whole pages. I was amazed that this kind of transformation could happen among numerous leaders of the same denomination at roughly the same time.

I was even more amazed that these leaders were able to courageously lead their entire denomination away from deeply entrenched—but wrong—teaching and into genuine Christian doctrine and practice.

It is my deepest desire for this same process to happen to the RLDS church. I still have family and friends in the RLDS church, and I would like nothing more than to see the Lord liberate them from Joseph Smith, as he did my family and me. Most people I have shared this dream with feel I am being hopelessly optimistic, and unrealistic. But I feel that if God was both willing and able to do this for the Worldwide Church of God, then he can do it for the RLDS. And so the WCG journey gives me hope and inspiration. 🌟