

Kate Kelly Never Happier After Mormon Church Excommunicated Her

Nearly a year removed from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ordain Women founder Kate Kelly says she has found happiness living a more authentic life while continuing to push for equality in the Mormon faith.

Kelly, who was excommunicated in June 2014, now lives in Nairobi, Kenya, where she works on human-rights efforts. She was back here briefly on April 23 as part of an offshoot project of the Tribeca Film Festival in New York City to explain how she was punished for speaking out for women's rights in the LDS faith.

"The men who (excommunicated me) literally think they kicked me out of heaven," Kelly said. "Luckily, I do not think that. ... Out of this experience, I've realized that men don't get to control my happiness. I've come out on the other end, (where) I think I'm much happier, much more authentic, a much more invigorated person."

Still, on stage at the Gotham Comedy Club, a space usually filled by raucous laughter, Kelly broke down in tears talking about her ouster from the LDS faith and the repercussions for herself and her family.

"It's like an execution, a spiritual death," Kelly said of Mormon excommunication. "It's very, very extreme."

For their part, Kelly's Mormon leaders have said the door always is open to her return.

"Excommunicants may later qualify for rebaptism after lengthy and full repentance," according to the Encyclopedia of

Mormonism, “and still later may apply for formal restoration of their original priesthood and temple blessings.”

Kelly led the effort to allow LDS women to enter the all-male priesthood, but she faced a church disciplinary council and was removed from the faith’s rolls in June. Top Mormon leaders declined to overturn that decision earlier this year, and Kelly’s husband, Neil Ransom, resigned from the Utah-based faith.

Kelly shared the stage here with MSNBC’s Abby Huntsman, who has also spoken out about her concerns with the LDS Church.

Huntsman, daughter of former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, said that if all Mormon women were in the room for the discussion, she imagines plenty of them would feel the same but feared speaking out.

“It’s a balance and it’s tough, and that’s why I commend Kate for what she’s saying,” Huntsman said. “It’s not easy. ... Kate has been an inspiration for me.”

Kelly said she still practices the LDS faith – “I don’t think Mormonism washes off,” she added – but added she no longer feels bound by some “arbitrary” church rules.

She pulled aside her yellow cardigan to show her sleeveless dress. Excommunicated Mormons are told to stop wearing LDS temple garments, which devout members wear.

One of her bigger worries, she told the small Manhattan crowd, was that her exit from the church would strike fear into the Ordain Women movement, hurting its chances at making any progress.

“I was afraid they would back down, afraid it would dissipate,” she said. “Much to my surprise and delight, the opposite has happened. It’s galvanized the movement.”

She said she knows of people who have lost their jobs and been

disowned by their families for backing the equality effort for Mormon women. But, like any such push, she said, it's worth it.

Kelly said her parents, who live in Provo, no longer can attend LDS temple services, have had their mailbox smashed and been shunned by fellow Mormons for supporting her.

"Whenever you get that kind of pushback," she said, "you know you're doing the right thing."