

# Email prompts Mormon church to reaffirm that it's neutral on Mitt Romney

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By Thomas Burr | Religion News Service

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WASHINGTON — Mormon leaders say the church is not attempting to sway members to support Mitt Romney's presidential bid after an email surfaced suggesting to Mormon leaders in Nevada to register the faithful to vote and named a contact person who appears to support Romney.

"LDS public affairs specialist" Mark Severts last month emailed dozens of stake presidents, each of whom oversees several Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints congregations, in southern Nevada encouraging a get-out-the-vote drive for members. He said those who are interested should contact Ron and Judy Tobler, according to Jon Ralston, an independent Nevada journalist who formerly worked for the Las Vegas Sun.

Judy Tobler on her Facebook page lists Romney as one of her interests, with a link to his campaign page. She has not donated to the candidate and does not appear to have any formal role in the campaign. She did not respond to a message seeking comment.

It was unclear if Severts was a church employee or volunteer. He lists his job on social media profiles as communications director for NV Energy.

The Utah-based Mormon church has been trying to tread carefully in this year's election, conscious of the sensitivities inherent in having one of its members vying for the White House.

Romney is the first Mormon on a major-party presidential ticket, and Nevada is considered a key swing state.

The LDS church on Monday (Sept. 10) dismissed concerns that it was helping Romney, reiterating its neutral stand in the race.

"The church has always encouraged people to be a part of the political process and to register to vote," church spokesman Michael Purdy said in a statement. "However, we do not direct them on how to vote."

Purdy said church members are encouraged to study the issues and the candidates, but that there's no official position on the candidates in the race.

"In short, we hope they participate in the political process," Purdy said, "but they will not hear from the church how they should be involved."

The Romney campaign did not respond to a question about the email.

(Thomas Burr writes for The Salt Lake Tribune.)

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