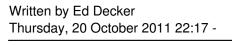
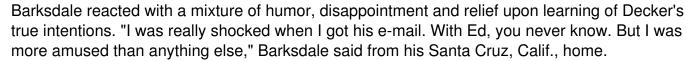


the church," he said, adding he would not pursue attending the conference further.





Barksdale e-mailed Decker back, tentatively welcoming him and asking for a draft copy of his paper. Now, he can make up his speaker's list minus the controversial LDS critic, though he left an invitation open.

"When I told my LDS apologetics e-mail group, half of them said 'No' or 'Heck no,' but the remainder said to bring it on," Barksdale said. "He'd certainly be welcome, but I tell you he might be uncomfortable -- he'd be facing a lot of the best minds in the LDS Church."

FAIR is in its third year, having been launched in late 1997 by a handful of Mormons participating in LDS discussions on America Online. They created a Web site as a repository for responses to church critics and later began distributing a free monthly newsletter. Barksdale said the FAIR site now averages 250,000 visitor hits a week. Meanwhile, the 2,500-member organization has published five books and is embarking on publication of a series of Mormon faith-promoting pamphlets.

Decker, too, operates a Web site for his ministry, which he says was called to "witness Jesus to those lost in Mormonism and other cults."

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