



Joseph had declared during the campaign, "If I lose my life in a good cause I am willing to be sacrificed on the altar of virtue, righteousness, and truth in maintaining the laws and Constitution of the United States, if need be, for the general good of mankind."

“For the General Good of Mankind”: Why Joseph Smith’s Presidential Campaign Matters

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Joseph Smith’s 1844 campaign for president of the United States is much more than a curious footnote in Latter-day Saint history. Recent scholarship, including *Storming the Nation*,¹ confirms that the campaign aligned with the Restoration’s goals to gather Israel, establish Zion, and protect the rights of all humanity. By examining the reasons, means, and outcomes of Joseph’s² campaign, we can highlight truths of the Restoration that are central to our students’ covenant responsibility to gather Israel and prepare the world for the Second Coming.

The primary impulse of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the nineteenth century was to restore not only the true Church of Jesus Christ but also the Zion kingdom destined to govern the world during the Millennium. This establishment of righteous, divinely sanctioned government stands as the first of two revelatory strands that led to Joseph’s decision to run for president. However, Zion’s unique doctrine of gathering and living an all-encompassing lifestyle conflicted with American religious, social, economic, and political ideals. In time, these frictional differences sparked violence that evicted the Saints first from a county and then from an entire

state. Ensuing revelations commanded the Saints to petition the government for protection and redress. Joseph's decade-long struggle to protect Zion based on these revelations became the other strand that led to his campaign. In this article it is not possible to completely contextualize the development of these two threads that led to Joseph's campaign. While I will provide the basic outlines, readers can find additional details from the sources provided in the notes. My purpose is to outline the historical events and to provide principles modern teachers and students might learn about and apply today.³

“Bring Forth and Establish the Cause of Zion”

Restoration of a Zion Community

The Book of Mormon and early revelations detailed that Zion would be built in the Americas before the Second Coming of Christ and that its society would demand much more than contemporary Christianity. “And the Lord called his people Zion,” a revelation explained, “because they were all of one heart [a social component] and one mind [a political or governing component], and dwelt in righteousness [a religious component]; and there was no poor among them [an economic component]” (Moses 7:18). Other Zion revelations instructed the Saints to gather together “to build unto the Lord a house whereby [the Lord] could reveal unto his people the ordinances of his house.”⁴ In the temple, the Saints would make covenants gathering them to Christ and committing them as individuals and as a community to establish Zion. Further revelations fleshed out her elements—priesthoods, temple covenants, and ordinances for the religious, eternal sealings for the social, the kingdom of God for the political, and the law of consecration for the economic.

When the Lord revealed Jackson County, Missouri, as the New Jerusalem, the Saints began laboring to “bring forth and establish the cause of Zion” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:6). The revelations divided the world between Zion (and her stakes) and the mission field, “white already to harvest” (4:4). As the Saints built Zion through keeping their covenants, they would be endowed with power from the temple to go into the world and “reap with all [their] might” (33:7). Converts would then gather to Zion and make their own temple covenants, and the cycle would continue. Zion would bring the beginning of world renewal and establish a people prepared for Christ's return.

While most who join the Church would be from the scattered house of Israel, Zion also included the Gentiles. “I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world,” Christ said, “to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people and for the Gentiles to seek to it . . . to prepare the way before me” (Doctrine and Covenants 45:9). As the Lord is “no respecter of persons” (38:16), he plans to redeem the “heathen nations” and those who will not choose the full gospel, so that they “have part in the first resurrection [where] it shall be tolerable for them” (45:54). Before, during, and after the cataclysms accompanying the Second Coming, the kingdom of God will protect not just celestial Saints but also the terrestrial “honorable” of the earth (76:75).⁵ Thus building Zion held these dual roles in preparing the world for the return of Christ—gathering Israel to Christ and enlightening and protecting the honorable of humanity. “Therefore, blessed are you,” the Lord said to his Saints, “if ye continue in my goodness, a light unto the Gentiles, and through this priesthood, a savior unto my people Israel” (86:11).

Zion Hindered

The convictions of Zion’s people, however, stood in sharp contrast to the beliefs of fellow Americans. New scripture, revelations, and doctrines—coupled with their gathering under priesthood authority—seemed blasphemous and despotic. Collective political power in the name of religion, untied to political parties, was anathema in an age of powerful party politics. Economic cooperation challenged free-market capitalism. Sadly, conflicting beliefs on the nineteenth-century frontier often meant violence.⁶ When mobs drove the Saints from Jackson County, Joseph questioned heaven about what to do. The Lord instructed the Saints to “continue to importune for redress, and redemption, by the hands of those who are placed as rulers and are in authority over you” (Doctrine and Covenants 101:76). If the authorities, from county government to the president, “heed [their petitions] not, then will the Lord arise . . . and in his fury vex the nation” (101:89).

Ultimately, petitions to all three branches of government at all levels garnered nothing. When the Mormon War of 1838 broke out in northern Missouri, there was nothing stopping the governor from ordering the extermination of the Saints. While Joseph languished in jail, government-backed mobs terrorized the Saints with indiscriminate murder, rape, theft, and destruction of property. Eventually, Missourians allowed Joseph to “escape” and join the Saints, who were now gathered in Illinois. Joseph believed

national public sentiment supported the Saints and hand delivered petitions of redress to Congress and the president. The congressional petition died in committee and President Martin Van Buren famously told the Prophet to his face, “Your cause is just, but I can do nothing for you—if I do anything, I shall come in contact with the whole State of Missouri.”⁷ Joseph returned to the new settlement of Nauvoo furiously questioning, “Is there not virtue in the body politic?”⁸ He became convinced that the Saints needed the protection of virtuous government to avoid a repeat of the mobocracy and atrocities of Missouri.

Zion Threatened in Nauvoo

Illinois politicians stumbled over each other courting the votes of the thousands of new Latter-day Saint refugees. Joseph leveraged their outreach to obtain the Nauvoo Charter and Legion that for a time stood as a defensive wall to protect a “city-state” of Zion.⁹ However, the same elements of Zion, now including rumors of plural marriage, brought renewed confrontation with their neighbors. Looking for help, Joseph wrote to the five potential presidential candidates of 1844 asking, “What will be your rule of action relative to us as a people, should fortune favor your ascension to the chief magistracy?”¹⁰ Only three responded. None offered help.

Therefore, on 29 January 1844, Church leaders moved “that Joseph Smith be a candidate for the next presidency and that we use all honorable means to secure his election.”¹¹ Over the coming months, they mobilized members to assist, including the formation of the confidential Council of Fifty and a cadre of over six hundred political missionaries to electioneer in every state.¹² The two strands—righteous government to receive Christ’s return *and* protection of all citizens’ rights—were fused in the Prophet’s campaign. By examining both strands as they played out in Joseph’s campaign, we can harvest truths that are relevant for our students today.

“Kings and Priests to God”¹³—Becoming and Gathering Israel for the Second Coming

Joseph Smith’s Campaign

The unfolding doctrines of the Saints’ part in preparing the world for the Second Coming influenced Joseph’s decision to run for president. From the spring of 1842 until his death in June 1844, the Prophet taught truths

revealing that the house of Israel had spiritual and political positions as priest-kings and priestess-queens. These roles allowed for the gathering of covenant Israel on both sides of the veil and the eventual establishing of the political kingdom of God.

The political kingdom revealed. The publishing of the Book of Abraham and the creation of the Nauvoo Relief Society in March 1842 added to the ongoing revelation about the kingdom. When the Book of Abraham rolled off the *Times and Seasons* press, it buttressed earlier revelations that taught the dual nature of the Melchizedek Priesthood (see Abraham 1:2, 18; 2:9–11). Named after the “great high priest” and king of righteousness, those Saints who received this priesthood and lived its covenants understood they would inherit celestial glory as “priests and kings . . . of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was . . . after the order of the Only Begotten Son” (Doctrine and Covenants 107:1–3; 76:56–57). Furthermore, they learned that Abraham saw in vision the premortal “noble and great ones” whom the Lord foreordained to become “rulers” (Abraham 3:22–23). Thus, the Book of Abraham concretized that the Melchizedek Priesthood was dualistic—priest and king.¹⁴

When Joseph organized the Nauvoo Relief Society on 17 March 1842, he used kingdom truths tied to priests and priestesses and kings and queens—namely, theodemocracy, aristarchy, and temple ordinances. Different from other contemporary benevolent societies, the Prophet gave the Relief Society “something better”: an aristarchic theodemocracy.¹⁵ Since at least 1838, Joseph publicly championed aristarchy, defined as “a body of good men [and women] in power, or government by excellent men [and women].”¹⁶ This echoed the Lord’s declaration, “Wherefore, honest men and wise men should be sought for diligently, and good men and wise men should ye seek to uphold” (Doctrine and Covenants 98:10). Joseph later explained theodemocracy as “where God and the people hold the power to conduct the affairs of men in righteousness.”¹⁷ Revelation declared the Relief Society’s officers, whom the women then sanctioned by vote, the familiar practice of common consent. Joseph instructed that they continue serving “so long as they shall continue to fill the office with dignity.” The society would operate not by constitution but by revelation to aristarchic officers, thereby “mov[ing] according to the ancient Priesthood [Melchizedek]” and become a “kingdom of priests[esses].”¹⁸ The Relief Society was integral to the Restoration, including the preparation for the political kingdom of God, because “it takes

all [men and women] to restore the Priesthood,” for without women the “priesthood is not complete.” Joseph taught them that this would include the restoration of ancient temple ordinances.¹⁹

Temple ordinances. On 4 May 1842, the Prophet “instituted the Ancient order of things,” instructing nine men “in the principles and order of the priesthood, attending to washings and anointings, endowments, and the communications of keys, pertaining to the Aaronic Priesthood, and . . . the Melchizedek Priesthood.”²⁰ Others, including women, received this endowment the following year. What was the “ancient order of things?” It was the complete unfolding of the Melchizedek Priesthood, inherently a dual order—spiritual and political. Those endowed by Joseph became a part of the “Anointed Quorum.”²¹ Anointed, or chosen, for what? “To become kings and queens, and priests and priestesses [to] our Lord.”²² In 1843 Joseph revealed marriage sealings and “the fullness of the priesthood,” commonly called the “second anointing.” This ordinance was a “promise of kingly powers and of endless lives. It was a *confirmation* of promises that worthy men could become kings and priests and that worthy women could become queens and priestesses in the eternal worlds.”²³ With his “Anointed Ones,” the Lord could restore heavenly governance. With the rising threat of enemies inside and outside the Church, the Anointed Quorum began discussing the upcoming presidential election the very next week.

The Council of Fifty. They continued to meet, the kings and queens, to discuss religious and political decisions, such as supporting the Prophet in running for president, until 11 March 1844. On that day, Joseph organized “The Kingdom of God and his Laws, with the keys and power thereof, and judgement in the hands of his servants,” also known as the Council of Fifty.²⁴ This council *was* the kingdom of God and had three directives: train its members in heavenly governance, coordinate Joseph’s presidential campaign, and look for a place in Oregon, California, or Texas to establish an independent theodemocratic kingdom. These objectives mirrored the Lord’s earlier declaration that “the church may stand independent above all other[s],” and that the Saints “may come up unto the crown prepared for [them], and be made rulers over many kingdoms” (Doctrine and Covenants 78:14–15).

While the council used contemporary parliamentary procedure, Joseph insisted on an environment of counseling until unanimity brought revelation, according to “the order of Councils in ancient days.”²⁵ He earlier taught that “to receive revelation and the blessings of heaven it was necessary to have our

minds on god and exercise faith and become of one heart and of one mind.”²⁶ Thus for “any resolution [to] become a law [it had] to have the vote of all the members of the council.”²⁷ Joseph expected “all the brethren to speak their minds on [the] subject and to say what was in their hearts whether good or bad.” Council members needed to “disagree long enough to select the pure gold from the dross by the process of investigation.”²⁸ The council continued to execute Joseph’s presidential campaign until a mob executed him.

Relevance for Our Students

I have outlined some ways Joseph sought to solve the problems of his day and implement revealed truth. Under the direction of our current Church leaders, we might employ different practices for the problems of the twenty-first century. However, some principles from Joseph’s presidential campaign have universal application. For example, our students are among the “noble and great ones” Abraham said the Lord would “make [his] rulers” (Abraham 3:22–23). Our students need to understand this truth and how it connects to their role in the gathering of the house of Israel. This gathering to Christ comes through the covenants and ordinances of the temple that prepare and propel them to create a Zion society in which they act as priests and priestesses and eventually as kings and queens. Furthermore, revelatory councils are key to receiving the revelation needed to hasten the gathering and establish Zion.

Being noble and great rulers. When students fully understand that they *are* noble and great, “then things fit together and make sense!”²⁹ Their premortal choices elected them to the house of Israel, God’s covenant people, and thus they come to earth with “the election of grace” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:99; Romans 11:5).³⁰ This means they are born in the covenant or in a time and place where missionaries bring the covenant to them (Bible Dictionary, “Election”). In turn, they are trusted and under covenant to help the Father gather others of the elect to Jesus Christ, becoming “savior[s] unto my people Israel” (Doctrine and Covenants 86:11). Each of our precious students, furthermore, has been foreordained “to fulfill specific missions during their mortal lives” in the service of their Priest and King. Although our students “do not remember . . . [they] surely agreed to fulfill significant tasks in the service of [their] Father.”³¹ However, their election is not to lives of earthly praise or power but to lives of humility, to lives of following the Master by serving

and ministering to all of God’s children, thus giving their lives to Christ and his cause (see Matthew 20:25–28).

Like the noble and great ones before them, our students “received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in the vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men” (Doctrine and Covenants 138:56). As President Russell M. Nelson recently told our students about their “due time,”

Our Heavenly Father has reserved many of his most noble spirits . . . for this final phase. Those noble spirits . . . are you!

. . . You were sent to earth at this precise time, the most crucial time in the history of the world, to help gather Israel. There is nothing happening on this earth right now that is more important than that.

This . . . should mean everything to you. . . . You have the capacity to . . . have more impact on the world than any previous generation!³²

When our students’ spirits remember these truths and responsibilities, their noble souls awake not only to their own nature but to the nature of the work before them.³³ Sheri Dew, former counselor in the General Relief Society Presidency, eloquently extolled,

[You are] noble and great. . . . That is who you are, and that is who you have always been. Understanding that truth can change your life, because this knowledge carries a confidence that cannot be duplicated any other way.

When you understand that you were chosen and reserved for now, and when you live in harmony with that mission, you’ll be happier than you have ever been before.³⁴

Our students will choose to “have done with lesser things” and rise as the “Hope of Israel” and the world.³⁵ That is their birthright and faithful destiny, to be noble kings and queens who will “reign with [God] on earth for the great Millennium” (Doctrine and Covenants 43:29–30).

Receiving and offering temple ordinances. The priestly work for the Lord’s “noble and great . . . rulers” always leads to the saving and exalting covenants and ordinances of the temple. There, at the nexus of heaven, earth, and the spirit world, our students receive those blessings and in turn extend them to others. They help fulfill the Lord’s “covenant which [he has] sent forth to recover [his] people, . . . the house of Israel” (Doctrine and Covenants 39:11). Members of our rising generation love attending the temple, doing family history work, and performing ordinances for the deceased more than any generation before them. “We are very grateful for your worthiness and

willingness to participate in that sacred temple work,” President Nelson recently exclaimed to the youth. We join with him in saying, “We thank you!”³⁶

However, each temple ordinance “is not just a ritual to go through, it is an act of solemn promising” and receiving that must be carried out in order to become like Christ, the ultimate King and Priest.³⁷ True temple worship “requires a total conversion of mind and heart to be more like the Lord, to be an honest citizen, to be a better example, and to be a holier person.”³⁸ Because “everything that is learned and all that is done in the temple emphasize the divinity of Jesus Christ and his role in Heavenly Father’s great plan of happiness,” what we learn, feel, and hear assists us “in the ongoing process of spiritual rebirth and transformation.” As students worship in the temple for themselves and others, “heavenly channels” of the “power of godliness” flow into their lives and, in time, they will “conquer the world of evil.” Indeed, our students will help to usher in a new world that they will rule alongside the Savior for a thousand years.³⁹

Governing through revelatory councils. The Lord has governed his work through revelatory councils from before the foundation of the earth. Every level of the Church, and eventually the kingdom, is governed by councils because “the council is the setting for receiving inspiration.”⁴⁰ In their roles of furthering the Church, and in time the kingdom, our students must learn to govern with revelatory, experiential councils rather than through rote meetings.⁴¹ Recent changes in ecclesiastical structure and tone are meant to develop capability in the rising generation to govern through revelatory councils.⁴² President Nelson’s constant plea to develop greater capacity to receive personal revelation is the key. We must help and encourage our students, all of them, to do the spiritual work that revelatory councils require. To succeed in the present and future, they must “sit in council with the saints which are in Zion; otherwise Satan seeketh to turn their hearts away from the truth, that they become blinded and understand not the things which are prepared for them” (Doctrine and Covenants 78:9–10).

Our students should speak up in councils if they have a different idea or even disagree with what is being proposed. However, since it is a revelatory process, the tone of the disagreement must be correct. “Every man, before he makes an objection to any item that is thrown before them [a council] for consideration,” Joseph taught, “should be sure that they can throw light upon the subject rather than spread darkness, and that his objections be

founded in righteousness.”⁴³ Just like prayer, achieving governing revelation through councils is *work*. “In ancient days,” Joseph explained, “councils were conducted with such strict propriety, that no one was allowed to whisper, be weary, leave the room, or get uneasy in the least, until the voice of the Lord, by revelation, or by the voice of the Council by the spirit was obtained.”⁴⁴ Our students are “born to become kings and queens, and priests and priestesses for our Lord.”⁴⁵ We must encourage them to learn divine leadership through receiving revelation in their councils, especially in their families. We as teachers might also reconsider how we organize class leadership.

Thus the thread of divine governance in Joseph’s decision to run for president is essential for us to think and teach about. By understanding our students’ roles as future kings and queens, acting as priests and priestesses in gathering Israel on both sides of the veil, and in receiving revelation for the Lord’s work, they are building Zion and “preparing the way of the Lord for his second coming” and the renewed earth they will help govern (Doctrine and Covenants 34:6).

“Power to protect the innocent”⁴⁶—Being a Light unto and Protecting the Gentiles

Joseph Smith’s Campaign

The other revelatory thread leading to Joseph’s presidential campaign was the commandment to protect the rights and freedoms of the Saints. Additionally, the Saints were to be a light to the Gentiles and protect their rights and freedoms. The Saints were to take political action to safeguard those rights and freedoms, work with others to improve humanity generally, and be willing to sacrifice, or even die, for these efforts.

Petitioning, influencing, and choosing good government. The Lord “established the Constitution of this land [the United States], by the hands of wise men whom I raised up” to maintain “the rights and protection of all flesh” (Doctrine and Covenants 101:80, 77). Yet, fellow Americans and the U.S. government at all levels failed to support, protect, or give redress to the Saints in the 1830s and early 1840s. So, “as the world has used the power of government to oppress and persecute us it is right for us to use it for the protection of our rights,” Joseph announced. “We will whip the mob by getting up a candidate for president.”⁴⁷ He was running “to obtain what influence and power I can, lawfully . . . for the protection of injured innocence.”⁴⁸

The Prophet published a political pamphlet entitled *General Smith's Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States (Views)*. Church leaders mailed fifteen hundred copies to the nation's newspapers and government officials. Joseph had earlier declared, “The only fault I find with the Constitution is it is not broad enough to cover the whole ground.”⁴⁹ *Views* outlined Joseph's plan “to cover” all citizens' rights. In 1844 the Bill of Rights was not guaranteed by the states, so he suggested that “the president [have] full power to send an army to suppress mobs. . . . [because] the governor himself may be a robber . . . destroy[ing] the very lives, rights, and property he should protect.”⁵⁰ Twenty-four years later, the Fourteenth Amendment finally required states to give each citizen “equal protection” under the law.

As a presidential candidate, Joseph was among the first to advocate the end of slavery.⁵¹ “Break off the shackles from the poor black man,” he implored, “and hire him to labor like other human beings.” Joseph proposed “pay[ing] every man a reasonable price for his slaves” through the sale of federal land.⁵² Decades later, influential politician and educator Josiah Quincy wrote that Joseph had been a true statesman to publish the first practical plan that might have avoided the “terrible cost of the fratricidal [civil] war.”⁵³ The Prophet particularly lamented political divisiveness. “Unity is power,” he proclaimed, “and when I reflect on the importance of it to the stability of all governments, I am astounded at the silly moves of persons and parties to foment discord in order to ride into power on the current of popular excitement.”⁵⁴ Joseph believed in the politics of unity and pleaded with all American citizens to “arise phoenix like” and “cheerfully help” restore America's promise.⁵⁵

To the Saints, Joseph explained, “[It is] our duty to concentrate all our influence to make popular that which is sound and good, and [to make] unpopular that which is unsound. Tis right politically for a man who has influence to use it.”⁵⁶ As part of this effort, over six hundred men and one woman volunteered to preach the gospel and campaign for Joseph. In every state, they “electioneer[ed] with all people, male and female, and exhort[ed] them to” vote for Joseph.⁵⁷

Partnering with others. On 18 April 1844 Joseph exclaimed in a Council of Fifty meeting that “the principles of intolerance and bigotry never had a place in this kingdom, nor in my breast . . . and [I would be] ready to die rather than yield to such things. . . . Only think! When a man can enjoy his liberties and has the power of civil officers to protect him, how happy he is.” Joseph was so animated he “broke . . . in two down the middle” a two-foot ruler he

was using “pretty freely” as he spoke.⁵⁸ The Prophet intentionally taught and advocated religious freedom and interfaith cooperation.

During the campaign, Church leaders looked to Catholics as natural political allies since both were experiencing religious persecution. Mobs in the 1844 Philadelphia Bible Riots burned down dozens of Catholic homes, businesses, and churches, killing or wounding hundreds. Joseph’s campaign wrote to Hugh Clark, a Catholic leader at the center of the riots, offering an alliance. “The Mormons and the Catholics . . . [are] the only two who have suffered from the cruel hand of mobocracy for their religion under the name of foreigners,” the letter said. Together they could “stay this growing evil and establish Jeffersonian Democracy!” “Help us to elect this man [Joseph],” the letter continued, “and we will help you to secure those privileges which belong to you and break every yoke.”⁵⁹

Furthermore, the campaign adopted the name “Jeffersonian Democracy” to reach those Americans who believed partisan politics had corrupted true American (Jeffersonian) Republicanism.⁶⁰ Since Republicanism dovetailed with many parts of Joseph’s political platform and aristarchic model, using Jeffersonian Democracy translated his campaign to a gentile audience. As the political missionaries preached it, they had surprising success in many places. In Comstock, Michigan, an “audience . . . manifest[ed] great interest and attention,” accepting *Views* with “good satisfaction.”⁶¹ A “mass meeting of the citizens without distinction of sect and party assembled” in Peterborough, New Hampshire, to hear the electioneers. After a “free expression of feelings,” a committee of citizens wrote “resolutions expressive of the views of the meeting,” which the participants voted overwhelmingly to accept.⁶²

David S. Hollister traveled by steamboat to Baltimore to prepare Joseph’s national convention. En route, he preached and politicked like “a lion.” One day, a Missourian tried to knife him for being “Mormon.” While he fended off the attack, it foreshadowed the violence that brought the campaign to an abrupt, brutal end.⁶³ Two months later, Hollister and handful of electioneers opened but promptly closed Joseph’s convention, tears streaming down their cheeks. They had learned the day before that a mob murdered Joseph and Hyrum Smith two weeks earlier—the first assassination of a presidential candidate in American history.⁶⁴

“Willing to be sacrificed . . . for the general good of mankind.” “I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of . . . a good man of any . . . denomination [as I would a Saint],” Joseph proclaimed a year before his death, “for the

same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter-day Saints would trample upon the rights of . . . any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves.”⁶⁵ His electioneers were just as willing to sacrifice. Alfred Cordon and James C. Snow left their families without even a pound of flour. John Blanchard and others were widowers, entrusting their children to others. More than a dozen were newlyweds, and seventy left pregnant wives or newborns. Some sold family heirlooms to finance their missions.⁶⁶ Often denied board, they regularly slept exposed to the elements. People ridiculed, threatened, spat at, and even assaulted them. Mobs stoned Levi Jackman and Enoch Burns and tarred and feathered Eli McGinn. Political agents and opponents often violently disrupted meetings from Chicago to New York City and from Boston to Dresden, Tennessee.⁶⁷

Yet the electioneers continued undeterred, believing “we must—we will—revolutionize this corrupt and degraded country so as to restore the laws and rights of the citizens, or we must and will perish in the attempt.”⁶⁸ They truly believed they were offering the nation religious and political salvation. Brigham Young told the missionaries, “This is a fire that cannot be put out,” and “We will turn the world upside down.”⁶⁹ While no electioneers died campaigning, when assassins murdered their candidate, their world *was* turned upside down. Joseph had declared during the campaign, “If I lose my life in a good cause I am willing to be sacrificed on the altar of virtue, righteousness, and truth in maintaining the laws and Constitution of the United States, if need be, for the *general good of mankind*.”⁷⁰ And so it was. That general good comprised all the truths of the Restoration, including the kingdom of God, and those truths “cost the best blood of the nineteenth century to bring them forth for the salvation of a ruined world” (Doctrine and Covenants 135:6).

Relevance for Our Students

Again, Joseph’s campaign sought to solve the problems of his time. While we may not exactly duplicate his efforts today, some truths behind the campaign have application. For instance, the rising generation intensely wants to be part of causes that improve the planet and its children. When they understand that this intrinsic desire comes from their Father whose plan is for *all* of his children, they will excitedly unite and sacrifice with others of good will to “bring to pass much righteousness” inside and outside of government (Doctrine and Covenants 58:27).

Petitioning, influencing, and choosing good government. While the Church has been politically neutral *regarding party politics* for over a hundred years, being politically active *is* our students' responsibility as citizens *and* as covenant keepers. In our communities and nations, they can work to ensure good government that facilitates the gathering of Israel and improves and protects all God's children. It begins with voting, where that is an option.⁷¹ The First Presidency has "urge[d] [us] to spend the time needed to become informed about the issues and candidates."⁷² As Latter-day Saints, we have a covenant responsibility to be informed on "things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad . . . and to obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man, all this for the salvation of Zion" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:79; 93:53).

Unfortunately, in the United States only about half of eligible citizens, including Latter-day Saints, vote.⁷³ This must change. As President M. Russell Ballard explained:

The civic duty of every Latter-day Saint, regardless of where they live . . . *is to be actively involved in the political process.* That means that they study the issues, they determine what the needs are as they see it, that they then use their freedom and their agency to vote according to their own conscience. *It's very important that good people everywhere are involved in this process.* It's dangerous for people to sit back and say, "well, let somebody else worry about it."⁷⁴

Why is it dangerous? "No matter how good a government is," Brigham Young taught, "unless it is administered by righteous men [and women], an evil government will be made of it."⁷⁵ President Gordon B. Hinckley also warned, "We are involved in an intense battle . . . between right and wrong, between truth and error, between . . . the Almighty . . . and . . . Lucifer. For that reason, we desperately need moral men and women who stand on principle, to be involved in the political process. Otherwise, we abdicate power to those whose designs are almost entirely selfish."⁷⁶

Being involved in government is more than just voting, however. "As personal circumstances allow," members of the First Presidency "encourage men and women in the Church to serve in public offices of either election or appointment, including school boards, city and county councils and commissions, state legislatures, and national offices."⁷⁷ We can also pray for our current leaders, even as the early Saints petitioned for "mercy, O Lord, upon

... the rulers of our land ... [and] the kings ... and the great ones of the earth” (Doctrine and Covenants 109:54–55).

Partnering with others. Some Saints ascribe to the faulty framework of “the Church versus the world,” whereas the real divide is between good and evil—a war much wider than the Church. As Orson F. Whitney said, “God is using more than one people for the accomplishment of his great and marvelous work. The Latter-day Saints cannot do it all. It is too vast, too arduous, for any one people.”⁷⁸ The cause of Christ (Zion) is “organized so as to extend its benign influence over . . . [and] ameliorate the condition of, the human family.”⁷⁹ The Lord “confirmed upon [us the gospel] covenant . . . not for [our] sakes only, but for the sake of the whole world” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:48). When our students internalize this, they feel encouraged to “embrace” and partner with “sincere souls from all religions [or none]” to improve individuals, communities, nations, and—ultimately—the world.⁸⁰ For “in doing these things [they] wilt do the greatest good unto [their] fellow beings, and wilt promote the glory of him who is [their] Lord” (81:4). By being “anxiously engaged in . . . good cause[s]” with others (58:27), our students’ “words and acts” will radiate out, “changing to a degree the life of the whole world around [them].”⁸¹

Our students can mimic the actions they see members of Christ’s Church perform among the human family. For example, the Church has partnered with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to revitalize impoverished neighborhoods in major American cities. Speaking at their 2020 national convention, President Nelson said, “We are all connected, and we have a God-given responsibility to help make life better for those around us.”⁸² The Church works with other faiths, notably with the Catholic Church, in advocating “religious liberty, the importance of the family, [and] . . . concern for the youth [in a world of] secularization.”⁸³ The humanitarian arm of the Church works “shoulder to shoulder as partners” with the Islamic Worldwide Relief and Catholic Relief Services “to relieve suffering.”⁸⁴ World leaders thank the Church “for our humanitarian aid to their people . . . [and] for the strength that our faithful members bring to their country as loyal, contributing citizens.” Other leaders express “their hope for the Church to be established in their lands . . . [b]ecause they know that Latter-day Saints will help to build strong families and communities, making life better for others wherever they live.”⁸⁵ One scholar has called the phenomena “Radiant Mormonism,” that is, the immense and disproportionate influence for good

in the world that radiates from the light of millions of covenant-keeping Latter-day Saints.⁸⁶

Willingness to sacrifice to be a light to the world. Like the Prophet and his electioneers, our students must be willing to sacrifice to reflect the Life of the World, who “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good” (Matthew 5:45). Our students must choose to radiate not just in their families and wards or branches but also into humanity as a whole. However, our students need not feel overwhelmed or that they must single-handedly change the entire world. “Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength and means,” the Lord has told us (Doctrine and Covenants 10:4). Yet he also declared, “Unto whom much is given, much is required” (82:3). The opportunities to change the world are as limitless as the number of people who can choose to change it. Again, our students can take a cue from the Church and reach out to the poor, defend religious liberty, help a refugee, teach someone a skill, strengthen families, learn about others’ faith traditions, or reach out to the friendless or vulnerable.

How can we make looking at the JustServe app as natural as looking at social media? How can we make *producing* sincere, spiritual videos shared “unto the ends of the earth” (Doctrine and Covenants 109:23) as instinctive as *consuming* endless hours of TikTok or Instagram media? How can we make joining with another faith’s youth or young adult group to clean a park more exciting than gathering over video consoles to compete in killing imaginary people?

“Shall we not go on in such a cause?”

Long before we and our students were born, “we [were] all enlisted” in the cause of Christ, “‘til the conflict is o’er”—and it is not over.⁸⁷ Our students are pivotal in Christ’s mission to gather Israel and be a light unto the world. In the following excerpt, can you hear President Gordon B. Hinckley imploring our students?

You cannot simply take for granted this cause, which is the cause of Christ. You cannot simply stand on the sidelines and watch the play between the forces of good and evil. . . . I urge you with all the capacity that I have to reach out in a duty that stands beyond the requirements of our everyday lives; that is, *to stand strong, even to become a leader in speaking up in behalf of those causes which make our civilization shine and which give comfort and peace to our lives.* You can be a leader. *You must be a leader.*⁸⁸

Our students can and must live up to their birthright as leaders—as “noble and great ones.” In priestly roles, they can gather themselves, their families, and others to Christ on both sides of the veil through the covenants and ordinances of the temple. As future kings and queens, they can learn to influence governments and humanity toward a Zion society, radiating the Light of the World before them so that others may see and live truth.

Nancy Naomi Tracy was the only female electioneer in Joseph’s presidential campaign. She insisted that her husband, Moses, personally ask the Prophet to allow her to accompany her husband to preach and politick in New York. Joseph wholeheartedly agreed, stating Nancy “would prove a blessing to [Moses].” Side by side with Moses, she taught the gospel and advocated Joseph for president. Fifty years later, Nancy surveyed all she sacrificed on that mission and throughout the rest of her life to establish Zion and receive the temple blessings she and her family possessed. “This kingdom shall roll on and eventually triumph over all others,” she wrote. “This is worth living for and, if need be, to die for.”⁸⁹ Her words and actions radiated the Savior’s promise, “And whoso layeth down his [or her] life in my cause, for my name’s sake, shall find it again, even life eternal” (Doctrine and Covenants 98:13). May our students, noble kings and queens, lay down their lives and “walk in newness of life,” in the life of *The Priest, King, and Savior* (Romans 6:4). “Shall we not go on in such a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, . . . and on, on to the victory!” (Doctrine and Covenants 128:22). **RE**

Notes

1. Derek R. Sainsbury, *Storming the Nation: The Unknown Political Contributions of Joseph Smith’s Political Missionaries* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020). Others include Benjamin E. Park, *The Kingdom of Nauvoo: The Rise and Fall of a Religious Empire on the American Frontier* (New York: Liveright, 2020); and Spencer W. McBride, *When Joseph Smith Ran for President: The Politics of American Religious Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

2. Throughout this paper, I will refer to Joseph Smith as “Joseph.”

3. In this paper, I will highlight relevant scriptures from the Doctrine and Covenants as well as from primary source material from Joseph Smith and other modern-day prophets. For more context, see the books in note 1 and Matthew J. Grow and R. Eric Smith, eds., *The Council of Fifty: What the Records Reveal about Mormon History* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017).

4. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. D-1 (1 August 1842–1 July 1843), 11 June 1843, p. 1572, josephsmithpapers.org. Spelling and grammar have been standardized throughout.

5. At the Second Coming, only those living a celestial law will not remain to enjoy the Millennium. One of the great projects of the Millennium will be missionary work to the vast majority of the population who have not yet accepted the fullness of the gospel. See Joseph Smith, Discourse, 29 September 1839, in *Joseph Smith Papers*, Documents, 7:15; “The Millennium,” Gospel Topics, topics.churchofjesuschrist.org; Robert Millet, “The Second Coming of Christ: Questions and Answers,” rsc.byu.edu/sperry-symposium-classics-doctrine-covenants/second-coming-christ-o.

6. For more on this, see Sainsbury, *Storming the Nation*, 23–24.

7. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. C-1 (2 November 1838–31 July 1842), pp. 998, 1016, josephsmithpapers.org.

8. “Extract, from the Private Journal of Joseph Smith Jr., July 1839,” p. 9, josephsmithpapers.org.

9. James L. Kimball Jr., “The Nauvoo Charter: A Reinterpretation.” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 54 (Spring 1971): 40–47.

10. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. E-1 (1 July 1843–30 April 1844), p. 1767, josephsmithpapers.org.

11. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. E-1, p. 1869, josephsmithpapers.org.

12. On the electioneers, see Sainsbury, *Storming the Nation*, chapters 3, 5, and 6.

13. The theme of kings and priests is ubiquitous in scripture. They are “anointed” meaning “the chosen ones” to rule and offer the gospel’s blessings. Some examples include JST Genesis 14; Psalms 2; 110:4; 1 Samuel 2:35; Hebrews 7:1; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; Doctrine and Covenants 76:56–57; 107:1–3.

14. In the Doctrine and Covenants, righteous Saints were promised “crowns” of glory twenty-nine times. Facsimile 2 in the Book of Abraham also has clear priest-king connotations.

15. Sarah M. Kimball, “Early Relief Society Reminiscence,” 17 March 1882; Relief Society Record, 1880–1892, 29–30, Church History Library (CHL) (CR 11 175).

16. *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. Noah Webster (New York: Converse, 1828), s.v. “aristarchy.”

17. Joseph Smith, “The Globe,” *Times and Seasons*, 15 April 1844, 510.

18. Sarah Cleveland, “A Record of the Organization and Proceedings of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo,” and other articles (1842–1844), 17 March 1842, “Women of Covenant” Drafts 1960, 1965, 1984, 1987–1994, 2000, CHL.

19. Cleveland, “Female Relief Society of Nauvoo,” 28 April 1842, 57 and 13 August 1843, 108.

20. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. C-1, 4 May 1842, p. 1328, josephsmithpapers.org.

21. This group eventually consisted of over ninety men and women. They usually met once a week to discuss, learn, and pray. See Devery Anderson and James Bergera, eds., *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed, 1842–45* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006).

22. *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 331. In the Old Testament, kings and priests were anointed to show that they were chosen to rule politically or spiritually.

23. Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a Place of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 260–61; emphasis added. See also Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. E-1, 6 August 1843, pp. 1687–88, josephsmithpapers.org.

24. Council of Fifty, Minutes, 14 March 1844, p. 31, josephsmithpapers.org.

25. Minutes, 17 February 1834, p. 29, josephsmithpapers.org. This is similar to the scriptural injunction in Doctrine and Covenants 84 that requires the First Presidency’s and Quorum of the Twelve’s decisions be unanimous.
26. Minutes, 27–28 December 1832, p. 3, josephsmithpapers.org.
27. Council of Fifty, Minutes, 11 March 1844, p. 28, josephsmithpapers.org.
28. Council of Fifty, Minutes, 4 April 1844, p. 81, josephsmithpapers.org.
29. Boyd K. Packer, “The Mystery of Life,” *Ensign*, November 1983, 18.
30. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 216.
31. *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 69–70.
32. President Russell M. Nelson and Sister Wendy W. Nelson, “Hope of Israel,” worldwide youth devotional, 3 June 2018, <https://churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2018/06/hope-of-israel>; emphasis added.
33. See Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. E-1, 7 April 1844, 1957–58. The Spirit brings all things to our remembrance (see John 14:26).
34. Sheri L. Dew, “Knowing Who You Are—and Who You Have Always Been,” *Ensign*, July 2018, 11; emphasis added.
35. William Pierson Merrill, “Rise Up, O Men of God,” in *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 323; and Joseph L. Townsend, “Hope of Israel,” in *Hymns*, no. 259.
36. Russell M. Nelson, “Closing Remarks,” *Ensign*, November 2019, 121.
37. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 638.
38. Nelson, “Closing Remarks,” 122.
39. David A. Bednar, “Let This House Be Built unto My Name,” *Ensign*, May 2020, 86.
40. See David A. Bednar, “Panel Discussion” (worldwide leadership training meeting, November, 2010), <https://churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/miscellaneous-events/2019/02/13mendoza>.
41. Bednar, “Panel Discussion.”
42. Institute students in Young Single Adult wards have had opportunities to work in meaningful councils. Now, seminary students have a ward youth council to have the same experiences. Adult leaders need to get out of the way!
43. Joseph Smith, “Journal, 1835–1836,” p. 116, josephsmithpapers.org.
44. Joseph Smith, Minutes, 12 February 1834, p. 27, josephsmithpapers.org.
45. *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 331.
46. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. D-1 (1 August 1842–1 July 1843), 6 May 1843, p. 1547, josephsmithpapers.org.
47. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. E-1, 7 March 1844, p. 1913, josephsmithpapers.org.
48. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. E-1, 8 February 1844, p. 1886, josephsmithpapers.org.
49. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. E-1, 15 October 1843, p. 1754, josephsmithpapers.org.
50. Joseph Smith, *General Smith’s Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States*, 7 February 1844, p. 10, josephsmith.org.
51. The first was James G. Birney of Liberty Party in 1840.
52. Smith, *Views*, 9.

53. William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, eds., *Among the Mormons: Historic Accounts by Contemporary Observers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), 141.
54. Smith, *Views*, 4.
55. Smith, *Views*, 10.
56. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. D-1, 21 February 1844, p. 1475, josephsmithpapers.org.
57. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. E-1, 9 April 1844, p. 1995, josephsmithpapers.org.
58. Council of Fifty, Minutes, 18 April 1844, in *The Joseph Smith Papers*, CFM:100–101. In fact, one of the first laws passed in Nauvoo declared that all “religious sects and denominations whatever, shall have free toleration, and equal privileges in this city.”
59. Willard Richards, Nauvoo, Illinois, to Hugh Clark, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 24 May 1844, draft, Willard Richards, Papers, CHL. No documentation demonstrates that Clark wrote back; however, some circumstantial evidence posits that he may have temporarily joined the campaign. See Sainsbury, *Storming the Nation*, 165n2.
60. Not to be confused with the Republican Party, Republicanism meant representative democracy to prevent the tyranny of the majority, a “natural aristocracy” of virtue and talent, yeoman farming, and the belief that government should not violate individuals’ rights of property and person. Its proponents believed it required a moral people.
61. George A. Smith, Autobiography and Journals, 1839–1875, 8, Church History Library; and Jonathan O. Duke Reminiscence and Diary, June 1850–July 1857, CHL, 42.
62. “Jefferson Meeting at Peterborough, N.H.” *The Prophet*, 29 June 1844, 2. Only five dissented.
63. “Letter from David S. Hollister, 9 May 1844” p. [2], josephsmithpapers.org.
64. Joseph Albert Stratton, Joseph A. Stratton Diary, May 1844–October 1846, CHL, 7.
65. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. E-1, 9 July 1844, p. 1666, josephsmithpapers.org.
66. This paragraph relies heavily on Sainsbury, *Storming the Nation*, 63–64.
67. Sainsbury, *Storming the Nation*, 3, 5, and 6.
68. “Jeffersonian Meeting,” *The Prophet*, 15 June 1844, 3.
69. General Church Minutes, 9 April 1844, 35, CHL.
70. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. E-1, 8 February 1844, p. 1886, josephsmithpapers.org.
71. “We believe that men should appeal to the civil law for redress of all wrongs and grievances, where personal abuse is inflicted or the right of property or character infringed, where such laws exist as will protect the same” (Doctrine and Covenants 134:11).
72. “First Presidency 2016 Letter Encouraging Political Participation, Voting in US,” Church Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, released 5 October 2016, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/first-presidency-2016-letter-political-participation>.
73. <http://www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout/voter-turnout-data>.
74. M. Russell Ballard, “Why Should Mormons Participate in the Political Process,” 13 December 2007, Church Newsroom video, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=L4vhW-fTYKk>; emphasis added.
75. *Deseret News Weekly*, 3 June 1863, 2.
76. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Stand a Little Taller* (Salt Lake City: Eagle Gate, 2001), 15.

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77. First Presidency Letter, October 2000; see <https://deseret.com/2000/10/24/19535433/lds-church-press-release-first-presidency-reaffirms-political-neutrality>.
78. Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, April 1928, 59.
79. Council of Fifty, Minutes, 11 April 1844, pp. 189–90, josephsmithpapers.org. Erastus Snow is the speaker.
80. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Faith of Our Father,” *Ensign*, May 2008, 70.
81. David O. McKay, “The Mission of Brigham Young University,” Brigham Young University devotional, 27 April 1948, 3–4.
82. Russell M. Nelson, “NAACP Convention Remarks,” Church Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, released 21 July 2019, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/president-nelson-naacp-convention-remarks>.
83. “Prophet Meets Pope Francis at the Vatican,” Church Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, released 9 March 2019, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/prophet-meets-pope-francis-vatican>.
84. “Prophet Meets Pope Francis.”
85. Russell M. Nelson, “The Second Great Commandment,” *Ensign*, November 2019, 99.
86. Richard Bushman, “Embracing a ‘Radiant’ Mormonism,” *Deseret News*, 16 November 2017.
87. “We Are All Enlisted,” in *Hymns*, no. 250.
88. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 138; emphasis added.
89. Sainsbury, *Storming the Nation*, 288–90.