



Building Communities of Peace

Our shared history is full of examples where our relationships with one another and the surrounding community have been torn, stressed, and tattered.

Joseph Smith III, shortly after being ordained as our church president, felt torn from the community he had come to know and love in Nauvoo, Illinois. When word reached his neighbors and city officials that he had accepted a leadership position in a growing church, many responded with old feelings of anger based on their experience twenty years earlier when the church, under his father's leadership, held significant power over the political, social, and economic scene in Nauvoo during the 1840s. Out of the community's fear, Joseph III suffered from a surge of negative comments, public humiliation, and scorn from those whom he knew and respected. A group of Nauvoo citizens went to the extent of passing a resolution attempting to prevent Joseph from practicing his religion in the community. Joseph was deeply hurt. Years later, in his memoirs, he reflected on the pain he felt at the time:

"This feeling of prejudice against me because of my religion aroused my indignation. I was a pioneer of the county . . . No citizen could truthfully charge me with criminal conduct of any kind . . . And yet, to think that one so prominent as the mayor should oppose me and hold me up to public scorn, and that too, in articles to which he had not the decency to sign his own name!"

Rather than responding with vengeance, Joseph Smith III chose to disarm his opponents by continuing to be a caring friend, neighbor, and leader in his community. As a Justice of the Peace and School Director in Nauvoo, Joseph III showed his compassion for the immigrants of the community, upheld justice, and made decisions that were in the community's best interest, rather than his own. Over the years, his neighbors released their fears and embraced young Joseph for his integrity and compassion.

Seventeen years after being scorned by the public and at a time when the church was seeking a new place to build a community, Joseph Smith III received a petition signed by hundreds of Nauvoo residents asking him to sincerely consider making Nauvoo the new home of the Reorganization. Joseph reflected in his memoirs about his overwhelming feelings of gratitude as he responded to the invitation from those who had once rejected him:

"It is difficult for me now, after the years which have gone by since that day, to give an adequate expression of my feelings at the time . . . I found my spirit swept with a wave of strong exultation . . . I confess to shedding some tears as I spoke . . . trying to express my appreciation . . ."

From Joseph III experience, we learn that torn and tattered relationships can always be mended – through patience and forgiveness. May God continue to open our eyes to the torn world around us, so that we might weave a beautiful tapestry of community made possible through the peace of Christ.