

THE STORYTELLER

Exploring our Historic Connections to the Enduring Principles

“Listen to your own journey as a people, for it is a sacred journey and it has taught you many things you must know for the journey yet to come.”
Doctrine and Covenants 162:2a

Take a moment to discover how members of our faith community have modeled the Enduring Principles for generations...

“In our faith story, we see clearly God’s Spirit giving this faith community tools, insights, and experiences for divine purposes.”

President Stephen Veazey

GRACE AND GENEROSITY

STEALING APPLES IN NAUVOO

Peter Schenk arrived in Nauvoo as a curious boy in 1848. The young German immigrant resided in the small river town for more than fifty years and was considered one of the more influential and highly respected citizens of Nauvoo. When the local newspaper, *The Independent*, prepared to celebrate its 50th anniversary, Peter wrote a letter to the editor. Of all the memories and experiences shared during his time in Illinois, he chose to share a story from his childhood that involved a memorable interaction with Joseph Smith III that left a lasting impression.

One day, while walking home from school with his friends, Peter noticed some delicious-looking apples on the ground in the Smith family yard. The boys quietly sneaked to the trees and began filling their arms and pockets with apples. Just as they collected their fill and prepared to leave, they were surprised to see Joseph Smith III walking toward them. Knowing he was caught red-handed, Peter quickly emptied his pockets and dropped all of the apples in his arms, except for the one he was eating. Even more surprising than Joseph Smith III’s sudden appearance was his response to the boys. He said to the young apple thieves, “Those apples are no good, throw them away, and come back to the house with me, and I’ll give you some good ones.” Peter and his friends followed Joseph into the house where they found Joseph’s mother, Emma, and received several very good apples. The boys then continued on their journey home “feeling mighty happy at being left off so easy.” Peter Schenk and his friends experienced “grace and generosity” at the Smith house that day.



The Mansion House in Nauvoo

Emma Smith and her family resided at the Mansion House for several years. Today, thousands of visitors tour the historic home to see and hear the life lessons the Smith family left behind.

Joseph Smith III (right) lived in the Mansion House with his mother and brothers until he married Emmaline Griswold in 1856.



Sacredness of Creation



Sacred Grove at Palmyra, New York.

EXPERIENCING GOD IN NATURE

Generations of church members have been drawn to the natural environment when searching for answers to life's most difficult questions. The founder of our church Joseph Smith, Jr. retired to a grove behind his boyhood home at a time when he was wrestling with questions about his personal salvation.

At a young age, Emma Smith went to a forested area near her home to pray for her father, Isaac Hale. Emma was worried about his relationship with God. While she prayed, Isaac happened to be walking through the woods nearby and overheard Emma's heart-felt prayer on his behalf. He was so touched by his daughter's compassion and concern that he later joined his family's Methodist faith.

In 1851, Jason Briggs, an early leader in the Reorganization, wandered to a prairie near his farm in Beloit, Wisconsin, when he desperately needed God's guidance. This quiet moment of prayer changed Jason Briggs' life and impacted generations of church members.

Joseph, Emma, and Jason each had an experience with God while on their knees in prayer and surrounded by the beauty of creation. In the same way, church members today seek guidance and understanding by finding a quiet place surrounded by nature at church campgrounds and reunions around the world. In nature we find the peace of Christ.

*"The earth, lovingly created as an environment for life to flourish, shudders in distress because creation's natural and living systems are becoming exhausted from carrying the burden of human greed and conflict."
Doctrine and Covenants 163:4b*

"Revelatory experience is a key part of our church's beginning. It has functioned in transforming ways throughout our history. It will play a vital role in the future."

President Stephen Veazey

CONTINUING REVELATION

ZION'S CAMP AND THE MARCH TO MISSOURI

Community of Christ is a story of a prophetic people. Early church members felt the divine influence close at hand and were open to hearing God's guidance in the form of revelations. Early revelations encouraged members in their sacrifice. At other times, revelations caused the listener to reverse direction and make right the wrongs in life.

Such was the case at Fishing River, Missouri, on June 22, 1834. A militant group of 200+ church members called "Zion's Camp" had marched to Jackson County, seeking to recover property unjustly taken from church members who were forced from their homes. Some members wanted revenge on the Missourians who mistreated their friends and family. Others were armed and seeking justice. Legal negotiations had failed

and it appeared the only option was armed conflict. As Zion's Camp arrived outside of Independence on June 22, Joseph Smith, Jr. prayed for guidance. A revelation was given that told those gathered at Fishing River to "... Sue for peace, not only the people that have smitten you, but also to all people; and lift up an ensign of peace, and make a proclamation for peace unto the ends of the earth; and make proposals for peace, unto those who have smitten you...according to the voice of the Spirit which is in you...therefore, be faithful, and, behold, and lo, I am with you even unto the end..." (later recorded as Doctrine and Covenants 102:11). This revelation was counter to the feelings of aggression and anger shared among the members of Zion's Camp. The message called members to lay down their arms and pursue peace. The story of Zion's Camp teaches us that belief in Continuing Revelation is a commitment to listen to God's message, no matter the circumstances.

WORTH OF ALL PERSONS

CHARLES NEFF TRAVELS TO INDIA

When Charles Neff arrived in India in 1966, he had no idea his life was about to be changed. After arriving in Berhampur, Neff and his fellow church members from India packed up supplies and traveled 45 miles by bus into the jungle. They then walked 14 miles through foothills, dense undergrowth, and small streams on a narrow rocky path, to the village of Antarba. Unfortunately, Neff made the mistake of wearing a new pair of shoes. By the end of the journey his feet were so badly blistered he could hardly walk. When he arrived at the village, he sat down and slowly removed his shoes. A crowd soon gathered around him, looking at his injured feet. One woman observed his pain, went to her hut and returned with a bowl of water. She then proceeded to break several cultural taboos as she knelt before him and carefully washed his aching feet.

This woman's act of helping a stranger in need was a bold move in her native country. During this time in India it was inappropriate for a woman to touch, or be touched, by another man outside her family. Her act of kindness was not a small gesture, but rather a risk that could have resulted in the woman being ostracized from her community.

Neff knew the risks this woman was taking as she gently washed and massaged his swollen feet. It was among the finest examples of Christian witness he had ever experienced. He later said of the woman, "I believe that was the Lord Jesus coming to me in my time of need." In that moment, Neff was experiencing what it meant to be a person of worth in the eyes of a stranger.

In 1979, Apostle Charles Neff founded Outreach International in response to the poverty and despair he witnessed in the Philippines. His commitment and actions to alleviate poverty in the world is a testament to his belief in the Worth of All Persons.



Alexander (left) with his brother, David Hyrum Smith (right)

ALL ARE CALLED

ALEXANDER SMITH AND THE OLIVE LEAF CONGREGATION

As a young adult in Nauvoo, Illinois, Alexander Smith attended a small congregation known as the "Olive Leaf." One day, as the members gathered to elect officers, the pastor invited them to pray for guidance about a priesthood call. One member stood and shared that the Spirit had testified to him that Alexander was to be called to the office of teacher. Alexander was stunned and thought the man was surely kidding. Suddenly, a second person stood and confirmed Alexander's call. Alexander soon realized the seriousness of the situation, leaped to his feet, and made his case to the congregation as to why he should not be considered for the priesthood. He argued that he was unworthy, inexperienced, ignorant, and unfit for such an important ministerial role. He confessed there was no way he could serve as a teacher over members who had been in the church nearly as long as Alexander had been alive. He said, "The task seemed altogether too huge an undertaking for me, and I tried to avoid it, for I felt that the office of teacher was one of the great importance in the church." He finished pleading his case to the congregation by pointing out that he feared speaking in public and a teacher would need the courage and confidence to stand before others during meetings. The congregation responded to Alexander's argument by pointing out he had been "speaking in public" for 20 minutes and doing fine. Alexander's congregation saw within the young man his calling long before he recognized it himself. He accepted the priesthood call and over the years accepted additional calls as missionary, apostle, and presiding evangelist. In Alexander's story we see how members of the Olive Leaf Congregation modeled the Enduring Principle of All Are Called.

RESPONSIBLE CHOICES & PURSUIT OF PEACE (SHALOM)

CHURCH MEMBERS IN TIMES OF WAR

Throughout World War II, church members were forced to make responsible choices. Wilhem Kreisle of Nuremberg, Germany, gave a pair of shoes to a slave laborer struggling to survive. For his act of compassion, Kreisle was arrested, tried, and sentenced to the Dachau extermination camp. During the next four years, he endured the threat of being ushered into a camp death chamber.

Youth in the church also were making difficult choices during World War II to help those who were suffering. Georg Sofke, an 11-year-old child in Germany was forced to make Responsible Choices when it came to his friendship with a young Polish couple. In 1942, the couple moved into the same house where the Sofke family lived. While Georg's mother was at work during the day, Georg would spend time with the couple. Shortly after their arrival, the young wife had her first baby. When the child was about a year old it became gravely ill and died. Georg's mother was unable to take time off work to attend the funeral. However, Georg chose to support his friends by attending. Fortunately, the funeral was held in the morning hours, which allowed Georg to go to the service before school.

While Georg walked to the funeral service that morning, he bumped into his school teacher who also was a former major in the army and a member of the Nazi party. The teacher was made aware of Georg's plans to attend the funeral and did not approve.

When Georg arrived in class, the teacher singled him out and said, "Look at Sofke there. He calls himself a German. I don't suppose he's noticed we are in the fifth year of the war, for it seems

he attends the funeral services of his enemies."

Georg knew personally about the tragedy of war as his

older brother had been killed during the conflict. Choosing to support the young couple, despite being persecuted by the teacher in front of his classmates, might have been a difficult choice for most 11-year-olds. However, it wasn't difficult for Georg. As an adult, he reflected on his decision and said, "I had learned the commandment of the Lord, 'Love your enemies,' and in my home the word of God was held in greatest esteem."

NEWEL K. WHITNEY SHARES A LESSON OF PEACE WITH YOUNG JOSEPH SMITH III

Tucked in a corner office of the Red Brick Store is a wooden writing desk. It carries a story that impacted Joseph Smith III's life. The desk was a gift from Newel K. Whitney, a family friend and former bishop in Kirtland and Nauvoo. While many of Joseph's neighbors were planning to leave Nauvoo in 1846, a few friends and relatives gave Joseph gifts. Much to his mother's dismay, among those gifts given were a bowie knife and a small pistol.

As Newel and his family prepared to depart Nauvoo, he shared with Joseph a gift to remember him by: a writing desk.

Newel compared his desk to the other gifts Joseph received and shared that the pistol and knife were weapons of war. Joseph later reflected Newel:

"...wished to impress upon me the sentiment that 'the pen is mightier than the sword.' I seemed to feel at the time that his intention was to foster within me a spirit of peace rather than one of conflict... The gift of Bishop Whitney led to the reflection that the spirit and weapons of war were among the evanescent things of life and would necessarily perish with the using but that the pen, mightier than they, would produce permanent things upon which the judgment of men would be based in the great hereafter. At all events these were the effects they produced upon me, for I did not imbibe the spirit of war, and had little use for its dangerous weapons."

Newel K. Whitney's desk was not only a wonderful gift, but a powerful lesson of peace that Joseph carried with him the rest of his life.



Newel K. Whitney's desk on display at the Red Brick Store at Nauvoo. Photo by Val Brinkerhoff

Teaching children about peace and living for others following World War II in Japan was important to Apostle Kisuke Sekine and his wife, Saku. In the 1960s they established "Zion's Kindergarten" a school for children in Okinawa, Japan.



View of Joseph Smith III's home in Nauvoo, Illinois



Kirtland Temple, Kirtland, Ohio

UNITY IN DIVERSITY & BLESSINGS OF COMMUNITY

UNITY IN DIVERSITY IN NAUVOO

In 1857, Joseph Smith III was elected Nauvoo Township justice of the peace. In this role, Joseph interacted with many German immigrants who then called Nauvoo home. Joseph grew increasingly concerned that Nauvoo's earlier settlers were taking advantage of his German neighbors. He commented in his memoirs:

"I drew their [the immigrants'] deeds, their mortgages, their contracts, and when they were brought before me in civil suits I managed in many instances to secure settlement out of court whereby they were saved much trouble and expense. For all these services I had freely lowered the costs and fees when any were too poor to pay or could ill afford to, and in many cases made no charge at all... It did not suit me to see industrious citizens oppressed because of their lack of familiarity with our language or customs."

Joseph Smith III built community through compassion for and solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. However, significant misunderstandings developed in the area after he became church president in 1860. Some remembered the violent conflicts in Nauvoo during the 1840s and worried history would repeat itself. They publicly opposed Joseph's involvement in the church and as a result, also opposed his bid for re-election as justice of the peace. He won the election, despite the opposition. Joseph attributed his victory to the immigrants in the community. They voted for him as a way of expressing their thanks for the kindness he had shown over the years. Together Joseph Smith III and the German community in Nauvoo modeled the Enduring Principle of Unity in Diversity.

EMBRACING HONESTY AS A "BLESSING OF COMMUNITY" IN KIRTLAND

Throughout our history we have experienced Blessings of Community. A few months before the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, Sidney Rigdon presided over a small worship service in a schoolhouse behind the Temple. Economic, social, religious, and political tensions were being felt among church members and not everyone was able to see "eye to eye." Before the worship service, Rigdon recognized the stress of building the Temple, living in poverty, and the concern for those in Missouri had carried some church members to the breaking point. Rather than continue with the service he had planned, Sidney invited the members of the First Presidency and 12 apostles to come before the congregation and confess their sins one to another. One wrote about the worship experience in his journal that those in the congregation "were soon overwhelmed in tears and some of our hearts were too big for utterances."

Sidney Rigdon's worship service in Kirtland and his willingness to be led by the Spirit in worship remind us of how we often experience the presence of God in fellowship with others. His experience also teaches us that repentance, humility, and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable with one another are among the many Blessings of Community experienced in Community of Christ.

"Be gentle and gracious with one another. A community is no stronger than the weakest within it. Even as the One you follow reached out to those who were rejected and marginalized, so must the community that bears his name."

Doctrine and Covenants 162:6c

Preserving the Past, Inspiring the Future



Kirtland Temple (above) is one of six historic sites owned by Community of Christ. Additional sites include: Joseph Smith Historic Site (Nauvoo, Illinois), Joseph Smith III's Liberty Hall (Lamoni, Iowa), Plano Stone Church (Plano, Illinois), Heritage Plaza (Independence, Missouri), and Far West (Caldwell County, Missouri). All are invited to visit Community of Christ historic sites to experience the excitement and inspiration of our shared heritage.

The Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation is dedicated to preserving and sharing church heritage with past and future generations. In addition to raising funds for historic site preservation and maintenance, the Foundation advocates for the historic sites, develops educational resources, funds young adult internships, and helps promote appreciation for Community of Christ heritage. To learn more about how you can help share and preserve church heritage, visit our website:

www.HistoricSitesFoundation.org

From:

Community of Christ
Historic Sites Foundation
P. O. Box 338
Nauvoo, Illinois 62354