

UNITED IN DOING GOOD

By Emma Hale Smith

This series highlights the lives of devoted women and their messages, excerpted from the book At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women (2017). The complete book, along with seven bonus chapters, is available in the Gospel Library app and online at churchhistorianspress.org/at-the-pulpit.

Be Ambitious to Do Good

[March 17, 1842]

“President³ Emma Smith remarked we are going to do something extraordinary. When a boat is stuck on the rapids with a multitude of Mormons on board, we shall consider that a loud call for relief. We expect extraordinary occasions and pressing calls. . . .

“[She made] remarks on the object of the society, its duties to others, also its relative duties to each other, viz., to seek out and relieve the distressed, that each member should be ambitious to do good, . . . [and] deal frankly with each other.”

Be United

[March 24, 1842]

“President E. Smith . . . rose and said that measures to promote union in this society must be carefully attended to. That every member should be held in full fellowship. As a society, [she] hoped they would divest themselves of every jealousy and evil feeling toward each other, if any such existed. . . .



ABOUT SISTER SMITH

Emma Hale Smith (1804–79) met her husband, Joseph, when he boarded at her parents’ farm in Harmony, Pennsylvania, USA. They were

married on January 18, 1827. Joseph’s mother, Lucy Mack Smith, praised Emma: “I have never seen a woman in my life who would endure every species of fatigue and hardship . . . with that unflinching courage, zeal, and patience.”¹ Emma briefly worked as a scribe on the translation of the Book of Mormon. She opened her home to the sick, the orphaned, and other visitors.

In July 1830, Joseph Smith dictated a revelation directed to her, now known as Doctrine and Covenants 25. She was elected president of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo on March 17, 1842. Though Emma met with the society only twelve times in 1842 and four times in March 1844, her leadership was crucial in shaping the organization.

The Nauvoo Relief Society functioned in a discussion format rather than formal lessons. Emma’s words, excerpted here, show her leadership.² Emma maintained her sense of spiritual authority, exhorting the women to repent as they strengthened each other and practiced charity. She encouraged unity and instructed the women on compassion and care for the poor.

“ . . . No one need feel delicate in reference to inquiries about this society. There is nothing private. Its objects are purely benevolent . . . , its objects are charitable: none can object to telling the good, the evil withhold. [She] hoped all would feel themselves bound to observe this rule. . . . It [is] the duty of every person to inquire into the condition of the poor and represent their true state.”

Begin at Home

[April 14, 1842]

“President E. Smith[’s] . . . desire was to do good. Wished all the members of this society to assist her. Said it was necessary to begin at home, to eradicate all evil from our own hearts. . . . Enforced the necessity of walking in a manner that would be approbated of God.”

Repent and Forsake

[May 19, 1842]

“Mrs. President continued by exhorting all who had erred to repent and forsake their sins. Said that Satan’s forces were against this Church.”

Live Right before God

[June 23, 1842]

“Mrs. President said she was rejoiced to see the increasing union of the society. Hoped we should live right before God, among ourselves, and before the world. . . . Said we had nothing to do but to fear God and keep the commandments, and in doing so we shall prosper.”

Strengthen Each Other

[March 16, 1844]

“Mrs. President . . . addressed the meeting upon the necessity of being united among ourselves and strengthening each other’s hands in order that we may be able to do much good among the poor. . . . We must throw the mantle of charity round to shield those who will repent and do so no

more. . . . She advised all to abide the Book of Mormon [and] Doctrine and Covenants.” ■

NOTES

1. “Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845,” 190, josephsmithpapers.org.
2. Excerpted from Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, Mar. 17, 1842–Mar. 16, 1844, 8–[126]; capitalization and punctuation standardized.
3. Nineteenth-century female leaders often held a variety of titles. In the Nauvoo Minutes, Emma was called President Smith and, to distinguish her from her husband, Presidentess, President Emma Smith, and Mrs. President.

In July and August of 1839, the town of Commerce (later Nauvoo), Illinois, was besieged by a malaria epidemic. In this painting, Emma is at the center of a circle of malaria victims, giving help and comfort.

