

THE **Voice** OF THE **People**

May we be a part of “the voice of the people” that chooses right and blesses our communities and families as a result.

By Michael A. Neider

It happens almost every time. Even when I have to wait in line for more than an hour and am late for an appointment, I still feel the honor, privilege, and joy of voting. The Spirit has always witnessed to me the virtue of participating in local and national elections.

Voting in government elections and performing other civic duties when we have the opportunity is a sacred responsibility, a God-given blessing, and a duty to be carried out with honor and trust.

I have a testimony of the importance of “being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law” (Articles of Faith 1:12). Because we are subject to rulers, we must do all we can in diplomatic, legal, and supportive ways to select and help elect officials who are honest, wise, and good (see D&C 98:10). We should also consider running for office ourselves and support laws that observe the “principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, [which belong] to all mankind, and [are] justifiable before me” (D&C 98:5).

I am always pleased when a First Presidency

letter is read in sacrament meeting just before each election encouraging Latter-day Saints to be involved in the election process and to choose able and honest political and governmental leaders. The First Presidency reminds us that “as citizens we have the privilege and duty of electing office holders and influencing public policy. . . . We urge you to register to vote, to study the issues and candidates carefully and prayerfully, and then to vote.”¹

Our elected officials are obligated to God and to the electorate to work for and to preserve peace, order, security, and prosperity so that God can bless His children. For its part, the electorate is obligated to direct its desires toward righteousness. The Book of Mormon teaches:

“It is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right. . . .

“And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you” (Mosiah 29:26–27).

As in the times of the Book of Mormon judges, today many people have the freedom to



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express their voice by their actions and votes. But if the people of our day choose iniquity, we too can expect “the judgments of God” to come upon us, which may result in a reduction of our freedom and security.

The Spirit of Service

I believe that the Holy Ghost can inspire God’s children to become positive, contributing members of the community and to work toward orderly government. On many occasions I have

felt the Spirit while engaged in Church and community service.

As a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood, I felt the Spirit’s confirmation as I thinned sugar beets on our stake farm in Tyhee, Idaho, USA. We teachers found the work hard, but when we had finished, we felt joy in having done our duty. The feeling was like a quiet whisper to me, saying, “Mike, you are a good boy for having done your work.” When our teachers quorum president encouraged us to do extra rows because “the bishop is not able to do all this work alone,” we mustered our strength and got back to work. By the time we had finished, we were especially tired and hungry. But by doing more than our assigned rows, we felt God’s approbation even more strongly.

I have felt the same confirming spirit of service while working in a Church cannery, at a pea vinery, in a bishops’ storehouse, and while helping a neighbor in need. I have felt the Spirit while working on school district committees, on fund-raising committees for medical institutions, and on other civic and governmental committees and commissions seeking to advance opportunities for children, address medical needs, and find solutions for community challenges.

I attended a school luncheon where my 83-year-old mother was recognized as School Volunteer of the Year. After my sister Julie had passed away, my mother moved closer to Julie’s family in order to be closer to Julie’s children. My mother served as a school volunteer almost every day, assisting a teacher and helping children learn to read and complete their assignments. I was grateful that the president of the Parent-Teacher Association and school leaders recognized her tireless efforts.

Through her example my mother inspired



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many others, including members of her own family, to serve and strengthen individuals and families, friends and neighbors.

God has instructed us to “be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of [our] own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness” (D&C 58:27). The Lord will help us achieve surprising results when we act in appropriate and diplomatic ways to accomplish good causes.

Making a Difference

During a visit to Japan, I learned that in one area the academic emphasis to prepare students for higher education opportunities created scheduling problems for Latter-day Saint youth who wanted to participate in seminary, Mutual, and even Sunday worship services. Local Church members prayed for solutions and then united with parents from various faiths and approached school officials. They patiently explained the need to adjust schedules, explaining how children, families, and the community would benefit as a result. Even then, many thought a solution would be impossible.

A new schedule was proposed and refined so that students could become more involved in family and church responsibilities while still attending classes and athletic events. The new schedule

was approved through the diligent, tireless, and diplomatic efforts of all, bringing the sought-for blessings and opportunities. The impossible had been achieved!

“We urge our members to do their civic duty and to assume their responsibilities as individual citizens in seeking solutions to the problems which beset our cities and communities,” the First Presidency has counseled. “Church members cannot ignore the many practical problems that require solution if our families are to live in an environment conducive to spirituality.”

The First Presidency added, “Where solutions to these practical problems require cooperative action with those not of our faith, members should not be reticent in doing their part in joining and leading in those efforts where they can make an individual contribution to those causes which are consistent with the standards of the Church.”²

In working in the community, we should make sure that people understand we represent only ourselves. *Handbook 1* states: “Candidates for public office should not imply that their candidacy is endorsed by the Church or its leaders. Church leaders and members should also avoid statements or conduct that might be interpreted as Church endorsement of any political party, platform, policy, or candidate.”³

May we follow the counsel of our leaders as we seek through the Spirit ways to support good public policy. And may we be part of “the voice of the people” that works for what is right, blessing our families, communities, and nations as a result. ■

NOTES

1. First Presidency letter, September 11, 2008; see also “Members Encouraged to Register, Study, Vote,” *Church News*, Sept. 27, 2008, 7.
2. In Spencer W. Kimball, “Living the Gospel in the Home,” *Ensign*, May 1978, 100.
3. *Handbook 1: Stake Presidents and Bishops* (2010), 17.1.33.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS: POLITICAL NEUTRALITY¹

The Church's mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, not to elect politicians. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is neutral in matters of party politics. This applies in all of the many nations in which it is established.

The Church does not:

- Endorse, promote, or oppose political parties, candidates, or platforms.
- Allow its Church buildings, membership lists, or other resources to be used for partisan political purposes.
- Attempt to direct its members as to which candidate or party they should give their votes to. This policy applies whether or not a candidate for office is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- Attempt to direct or dictate to a government leader.

The Church does:

- Encourage its members to play a role as responsible citizens in their communities, including becoming informed about issues and voting in elections.
- Expect its members to engage in the political process in an informed and civil manner, respecting the fact that members of the Church come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences and may have differences of opinion in partisan political matters.
- Request candidates for office not to imply that their candidacy or platforms are endorsed by the Church.
- Reserve the right as an institution to address, in a nonpartisan way, issues that it believes have significant community or moral consequences or that directly affect the interests of the Church.

In the United States, where nearly half of the world's Latter-day Saints live, it is customary for the Church at each national election to issue a letter to be read to all congregations encouraging its members to vote but emphasizing the Church's neutrality in partisan political matters.



Relationships with Government

Elected officials who are Latter-day Saints make their own decisions and may not necessarily be in agreement with one another or even with a publicly stated Church position. While the Church may communicate its views to them, as it may to any other elected official, it recognizes that these officials still must make their own choices based on their best judgment and with consideration of the constituencies whom they were elected to represent. (See D&C 134.)

Political Party Participation of Presiding Church Officers

In addition, the First Presidency letter issued on June 16, 2011, is a restatement and further clarification of the Church's position on political neutrality at the start of another political season. It applies to all full-time General Authorities, general auxiliary leaders, mission presidents, and temple presidents. The policy is not directed to full-time Church employees:

“General Authorities and general officers of the Church and their spouses and other ecclesiastical leaders serving full-time should not personally partici-

pate in political campaigns, including promoting candidates, fund-raising, speaking in behalf of or otherwise endorsing candidates, and making financial contributions.

“Since they are not full-time officers of the Church, Area Seventies, stake presidents, and bishops are free to contribute, serve on campaign committees, and otherwise support candidates of their choice with the understanding they:

“Are acting solely as individual citizens in the democratic process and that they do not imply, or allow others to infer, that their actions or support in any way represent the Church.

“Will not use Church stationery, Church-generated address lists or e-mail systems, or Church buildings for political promotional purposes.

“Will not engage in fund-raising or other types of campaigning focused on fellow Church members under their ecclesiastical supervision.”

NOTE

1. This statement can be found online at newsroom.lds.org.