

Being Good Citizens

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Framing

“Being a good citizen” is something we get really, really excited about... every four years. When the Presidential election comes along, suddenly we care about politics, and every vote matters. The democratic process holds out attention for months. But as we go about our day to day lives, too often most of us forget and neglect the fact that for politicians, *their* day to day lives involves making decisions that impact us profoundly. Politics is something that is so important it is hard to care about consistently. That’s one of the more troubling paradoxes of human nature... the more important something is, the more quickly it overwhelms us. I hope that this episode will inspire and motivate each of us, and give us a starting point for “being a good citizen”... which starts with being a good person, a good member of a family, a good neighbor.

New Resources

Lesson 44: Being Good Citizens

- [“Of Governments and Laws”](#): This article gives context for the revelation now known as Doctrine and Covenants 134. Written by Oliver Cowdery, perhaps with assistance of Sidney Rigdon, which is interesting. This article affirms members’ support of government and laws, and describes persecutions against them, but does not touch on Church members’ own vigilante, “extralegal violence”. The relationship of the LDS Church to US laws is indeed complex, and this one doesn’t feel representative or balanced (I found the Gospel Topics essay on Religious Violence to be superior).

- [“Housewife in a Foreign War Zone”](#): This presentation tells the story of Carol Gray’s commitment to working with others to promote peace in her region. First, what does this title even mean? How is “housewife” related to “foreign war zone”? Dr. Kate Holbrook is a well trained historian and am glad that her presentation is featured here. I hope the Church provides access to more lectures like this.
- [“Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson: Patriotism and Love of Country”](#): This one-minute video highlights President Benson’s service to his country. Benson is a complex figure when it comes to patriotism. It is interesting that Benson as Church President had a background in serving in the US Cabinet.
- [John Taylor sermon, October 10, 1852](#): This sermon’s section “Reflections on War and Power” acknowledges some of the shortcomings of governments even as Church members try to contribute positively to society. I found this to be a very interesting read. I especially liked the bit about the alien investigator. ☺ The critique of England is also sound.
- [“Religious Freedom”](#): This page from the Joseph Smith Papers website contains writings and statements from Joseph Smith on religious freedom and includes links to the original sources. Illuminating primary sources on an important topic. The freedom to express ourselves religiously and exercise our religion is a fundamental

Religious Freedom is guaranteed by the first Amendment to the Constitution. “Establishment clause: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of **religion**, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. But what are the limits to religious freedom? What happens when our religious expression conflicts with other laws (as was the case with polygamy). What happens when religious expression can be harmful (such as the relationship between Jehovah’s Witnesses and receiving blood transfusions). I think it is important to respect the religious freedom of others as we defend our own. I am personally sensitive to when people claim the right to bully or persecute others based on their own beliefs. Mormons should know better.

Productive Sunday Schooling

What does it mean to “be a good citizen”?

What are obstacles to being one? (Invite discussion for these next two sections)

These are all reasons I have experienced:

Being busy! (Between family, job, church callings, self-care and development, our resources are stretched pretty thin!)

Lacking information, not knowing how to find it (why vote when you don’t know anything?)

Feeling hopeless... what difference will our vote or actions make? (power and resources are in the hands of so few, who are out of touch with our needs)

The idea that only a few things count as “being good citizens” (voting, running for office, etc)

Where can we start?

Be a good person

Nuture healthy relationships, family and friendships

Be a good neighbor (such a simple thing, but it is rare! Has to be unconditional, form genuine relationships)

****Get involved in causes you are passionate about (I think this is the most powerful and promising. This is where I am focused, facilitating spiritual care in my jobs, volunteering at the VA and universities)****

Find out when elections are, and VOTE! (Do some homework! We put more research into restaurant visits and Amazon purchases than we do choosing the people who make the decisions that impact our lives!

Communicate with community leaders, make your voice heard

Get involved at a higher level when possible (which can be a natural extension of #4)

This website has a good deal of info about the dates of elections:

<https://ballotpedia.org/Elections>

Elections - Ballotpedia

Election coverage at the local, state and federal levels is a key element of Ballotpedia. See our Elections editorial approach article for more information on what we cover.

ballotpedia.org

Frequency of election depends on the state. Some states vote every few months (California) and some only every 2 years during presidential and midterm elections.

Candidate positions on issues:

<http://www.ontheissues.org/default.htm>

But those are more federal level elections.

This website has info on **some** local races: <https://votesmart.org/>

Some more good info, but hasn't been updated since last year:

<https://www.isidewith.com/voter-guide>



Most effective things to do depend on the level of government, and they're all somewhat limited, but they're better than nothing: Federal level: find out who the office representative is and schedule a face-to-face meeting to express your thoughts/concerns. Show up to town hall meetings, call the offices frequently and ask to pass along a message to the senator/representative. Same thing for local offices, but often you can meet directly with the individual.



<https://lifehacker.com/the-best-ways-to-contact-your-congress-people-from-a-f-1788990839>

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/06/what-calling-congress-achieves>

Of all the liberties guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, the most underrated by far is the one that gives us the right to complain to our elected officials. Freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly: all of these are far more widely known, legislated, and litigated than the right to—as the founders rather tactfully put it—“petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

There are a great many ways to petition the government, including with actual petitions, but, short of showing up in person, the one reputed to be the most effective is picking up the phone and calling your congressional representatives....

Does contacting politicians work?

“four well-informed doctors might persuade a senator to support the use of a certain surgical procedure in V.A. hospitals, but four hundred thousand phone calls to Senator John McCain are unlikely to change his position on the appropriate use of American military power overseas.

That kind of policy change isn't impossible, and it isn't unprecedented, but it is extremely rare. When I asked past and present Congress members and high-level staffers if constituent input mattered, all of them emphasized that it absolutely does.

But when I asked them to name a time that a legislator had changed his or her vote on the basis of such input, I got, in every instance, a laugh, and then a very long pause.”

The telephone might not be a superior medium for participatory democracy, but it is an excellent metaphor for it, and it reminds us of the rights we are promised as citizens. When we get disconnected, we can try to get through. When we get no answer, we can keep trying. When we have to, for as long as we need to, we can hold the line.

Full episode

an overview of global and US political systems

the question of why we need different views and perspectives

the issue of “religious freedom”

how we can make a difference as individuals, families, church members, and citizens

Conclusion (Don't be overwhelmed, prioritize, a few minutes here and there make important differences, develop relationships)