



## As Extremism Roars, the Prophet's Final Word Was Peace

By [Public Square Staff](#)

### FAITH

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*What should believers do amid extremism and grief? They choose peacemaking, refuse contempt, and honor every soul.*

President Russell M. Nelson passed away Saturday evening at age 101. News of his death reached Latter-day Saints worldwide even as many of us were preparing for Sunday worship. Hours later, our community woke to shocking reports from Grand Blanc Township, Michigan, where a gunman rammed a meetinghouse of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, opened fire, and set the building ablaze. Early counts vary—as is common in breaking news—and investigators are still determining a motive.

These two headlines—one of a prophet's passing, another of senseless violence—land side by side with painful irony. Only weeks ago, President Nelson offered what now reads like a valedictory charge in *TIME*: “[We All Deserve Dignity and Respect](#).” He

called the world to remember two enduring truths: the divine worth of every person and the duty to love our neighbors with compassion. That was his last public message to the broader world; it is also the right response to the spirit of our age.

We strive for radical civility and moral clarity following Christ. That is our commitment at Public Square, and we try to keep, especially on days like this.

## The Prophet's Consistent Plea

President Nelson's ministry consistently pressed toward peacemaking. In April 2023 he pled, "I urge you to choose to be a peacemaker, now and always." That appeal was not sentimental; it was covenantal—an invitation to practice the discipline of charity in a time addicted to outrage.

His *TIME* essay extended that same ethic beyond our chapels to the public square. He grounded dignity in divine identity and insisted that respect for persons should govern our speech and our politics. In a moment when "extremism" can be weaponized to mean "whoever strongly disagrees with me," President Nelson re-centered the term where it belongs: dehumanization that licenses contempt, and—at its ugliest edge—violence.

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## Peace Without Evasion

Peacemaking is not evasion; it is the discipline of rejecting contention while standing firm in truth. Few voices have framed this more clearly than President Dallin H. Oaks, who served alongside Nelson in the Church's presiding body, the First Presidency. Oaks has asked forthrightly what followers of Christ "[should teach and do in this time of toxic communications](#)," and answered by calling us to mirror the Savior's way as peacemakers. His counsel does not retreat from moral conviction; it refuses to let bitterness be our strategy.

For Latter-day Saints, this is more than conflict-avoidance. It is anchored in scripture's warning that "contention is not of [Christ], but is of the devil" (see 3 Nephi 11:29–30). The covenant path trains our tongues and tempers—not to silence our witness, but to purify it.

By that standard, moral clarity requires us to name the Michigan attack for what it is. Driving a truck into a house of worship, firing on congregants, and torching a sacred space desecrates everything the restored gospel teaches about the sanctity of life, the dignity of worship, and the inviolable worth of souls. Whatever investigators eventually conclude about motive, such violence is the opposite of discipleship and the antithesis of President Nelson's final public appeal. Reports are still being updated; early accounts indicate multiple victims and a deceased assailant. We mourn with those who mourn and condemn the assault without reservation.

"Extremism" has become a catch-all for people we don't like. That linguistic slippage is its own kind of problem. When we say extremism, we mean the posture—on right or left—that justifies contempt, licenses cruelty, and treats persons as obstacles. This mentality thrives on apocalyptic rhetoric, algorithmic outrage, and the narcotic of group purity. It confuses zeal with righteousness and mistake-making neighbors with existential enemies.

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The restored gospel offers a counter-formation. Covenants teach us to see persons first, to confess the limits of our knowledge, and to prefer persuasion over coercion. That is why President Nelson's repeated focus on dignity, respect, and peacemaking should not be read as soft-pedaling doctrine. It is a strategy for faithful influence in a pluralistic nation—one that refuses false choices between courage and charity.

## What Peacemaking Looks Like Right Now

On a day of grief and anger, what can ordinary believers do that is not merely performative?

- **Pray by name.** Pray for those killed and wounded in Michigan, for families newly navigating trauma, for first responders, and for local Church leaders shepherding devastated congregations. If you are nearby, listen for concrete needs—meals, blood donations, childcare, transportation—and meet them quietly. (Details are still emerging; follow local guidance.)
- **Refuse contempt.** In your home, group chats, and timelines, retire the demeaning one-liners. President Oaks warned about “toxic communications”; treat them as a spiritual hazard.
- **Tell the truth, tenderly.** Truth without love can become a cudgel; love without truth becomes sentimentality. The Savior calls us to both. President Nelson modeled that balance in his final essay and throughout his ministry.
- **Practice presence.** Visit a neighbor who grieves. Check on the Latter-day Saints—and the Catholics, Baptists, Muslims, and Jews—down the street. A community that shows up is a community that heals.
- **Break bread across difference.** Host a meal with someone whose yard sign irritated you last cycle. Eat, listen, and learn. The table is where enemies become neighbors and neighbors become friends.

## A Closing Appeal

President Nelson’s final public word to the world was peace rooted in divine worth. Even as we mourn his passing—and the violence visited upon a Latter-day Saint congregation in Michigan—we can honor both moments by the way we live the next one.

So we ask, as a staff and as fellow disciples: Please join us in thoughtful prayer. Gather your families and your congregations. Kneel together tonight. Pray for the wounded and their caregivers. Pray for the bereaved. Pray for the Michigan Saints who will rebuild a chapel and, more importantly, a sense of safety. Pray for the perpetrators’ family, too, who now carry a different kind of grief.

Gather your families and your congregations. Kneel together tonight.

And then break bread with your perceived enemies. Pull up an extra chair. Learn a name. Hear a story. In a season when extremism shouts, let our witness be the quiet, stubborn courage of peacemakers. That was the prophet's parting invitation. May it be ours.

*Editorial updated as of September 29, 2025; facts in the Michigan incident remain preliminary and may change as authorities release confirmed totals.*

About the author

## Public Square Staff

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