

Women of Faith Speak Up and Speak Out

The Genesis and Philosophical Underpinnings of Mormon Women for Ethical Government

Sharlee Mullins Glenn

Good government is ethical government. That is the premise upon which the nonprofit organization Mormon Women for Ethical Government (MWEG) was founded.

Like millions of people across the United States, I found myself growing increasingly alarmed during the 2016 U.S. election cycle as I watched the great rifts in our political landscape widen and deepen, abetted by the divisive and often vitriolic discourse on all sides. This division, combined with the flagrant flouting of basic human decency by some who were running for public office, awakened many of us to a sense of our duty as citizens.

During this time, Melissa Dalton-Bradford and I often volleyed our dismay (and simultaneous resolve) back and forth across the Atlantic via email and phone calls. Melissa, a dear friend of mine since grad school and a native of Provo, Utah, was currently living with her family in Germany. With the call from our leaders in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to reach out and actively help refugees wherever and however possible ringing in our ears,¹ we were particularly distressed by the anti-immigrant, anti-refugee policies and rhetoric coming from certain spaces. We both knew that we could no longer remain silent. We felt unambiguously called to action.

In one of our exchanges in late January 2017, Melissa and I asked each other, “But what do we do?” Our response to that question was the spark

1. “I Was a Stranger—an Effort to Serve and Include,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/refugees?lang=eng>.

that ignited and guided the creation of Mormon Women for Ethical Government:

We must turn our dismay into action. But we can't panic. First, and above all, we seek the Spirit. We stay on our knees and pray our hearts out until we know we have the Spirit with us. And then we get to work. Calmly, with focus, impelled by the ferocity of love, not fear, not anger. What do we do? We write and call our members of Congress, over and over again. We flood them with phone calls and letters and emails, and let them know that this kind of unethical and divisive behavior must not stand. And we use whatever other platforms are available to us to make our voices heard. We must work hard, but we also must work smart. Our power is greater the greater our numbers, so we have to mobilize.²

We have to mobilize. At the time, both Melissa and I sat on the board of *Segullah*—a literary journal and blog for Latter-day Saint women.³ The board had an online forum wherein we conducted business related to the journal, but often our conversations would turn to our concern about what was happening in the wider political world. On January 25, 2017, shortly after the above email exchange with Melissa, I announced to my *Segullah* sisters that I would be setting up a separate space—a Facebook group—where we could talk about how best to move forward as newly awakened political activists and advocates. This new group, I emphasized, would not be a forum for merely venting, but for organizing, for planning direct action. I asked who wanted to be added, and nearly everyone (around twenty-five women) said, “I’m in!”

Late that same night, I sat down at my computer—a prayer in my heart and fire in my soul—and got to work. I named the group Mormon Women for Political Action, though we soon changed it to Mormon Women for Ethical Government.⁴ I worked late into the night and into the wee hours

2. Thoughts expressed in private exchange between Sharlee Mullins Glenn and Melissa Dalton-Bradford, January 25, 2021.

3. *Segullah*, <https://segullah.org/>. *Segullah*, which takes its name from the Hebrew word signifying a cherished possession or treasure, was founded in 2005 as a print journal and later moved online. According to the *Segullah* website, the journal seeks to “encourage literary and artistic talent, provoke thought and promote greater understanding and faith among Latter-day Saint women.”

4. MWEG was founded a year and a half before President Nelson asked people to stop using the terms “Mormon” and “LDS” as a substitute for the full name of the Church and asked Church members to refer to themselves as “members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” or “Latter-day Saints.” See Sarah Jane Weaver, “‘Mormon’ Is Out: Church Releases Statement on How to Refer to the Organization,” Church News, August 16, 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/mormon>

of January 26, setting up the group and writing the group description. Even though I thought this would be a space for just twenty-five or so like-minded friends (at least initially), I felt compelled to formalize the guidelines and foundational principles by which the group would operate and which still guide MWEG today: the absolute commitment to civility and peacemaking, the laser-like focus on ethics and ethical government, the requirement that this *not* be a space where we criticize the Church or discuss Church governance and policies, the guarantee that it be a strictly nonpartisan group, and the insistence that the group be action oriented. We later encapsulated these guiding principles into what we call MWEG's four core attributes: faithful, nonpartisan, peaceful, and proactive. Because of my grave concern about the contempt and general lack of civility abounding in political discussions, I also felt prompted to stipulate that anyone joining the group would need to commit to the Six Principles of Nonviolence as articulated by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.⁵ We later adapted these principles into our own Principles of Peacemaking.⁶

All of these things were in place by the time I finished setting up the group at about 2:30 a.m. on January 26, 2017, before I added a single person. I know now, given how high emotions were running then, that had these guidelines and principles not been firmly established from day one, the group almost certainly would have imploded within the first few weeks.

The first person I added to the newly formed group was Melissa, followed by my daughter, Erica. I then added all of the *Segullah* sisters who had expressed interest. What I did not do (because I did not realize I needed to) was ask people not to add anyone else just yet.

What happened next is MWEG history. Almost immediately, those original MWEG members began adding like-minded friends who added

-is-out-church-releases-statement-on-how-to-refer-to-the-organization?lang=eng. For an explanation of why MWEG chooses not to change its name at this point, see "Frequently Asked Questions: Why do you still use the name 'Mormon?'" MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/FAQ>; and "Announcement Regarding MWEG's Name," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, December 11, 2018, <https://library.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/announcement-regarding-mweps-name/>.

5. "Six Principles of Nonviolence," The Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/sites/mlk/files/lesson-activities/six_principles_of_nonviolence.pdf.

6. "The Six Principles of Peacemaking," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/six-principles-of-peacemaking>.

friends who added friends. And within a few days, our numbers had grown to over one thousand members. Within just a few weeks, we had over four thousand.

What I did not know—could not have known—in those early hours of January 26, 2017, is that there were literally thousands of other Latter-day Saint women out there who were feeling exactly as Melissa, Erica, and I were. There were thousands of our sisters in the restored gospel who felt the exact same call to action, who were ready to claim their moral authority as women and as citizens, who refused to be complicit by being complacent—and they were just waiting for someone to build the field of dreams, so to speak, so that they could come and play some activist ball! One of our members wrote this shortly after finding the group: “I am in tears. I thought I was almost alone—and here are my sisters, already gathered, ‘fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners’ (Song 6:10)!”⁷

We later wrote the following in *The Little Purple Book: MWEG Essentials*, a book outlining MWEG’s founding and core principles that was published by the nonprofit By Common Consent Press in 2018: “Mormon Women for Ethical Government was born of desire, frustration, and hope: the desire to act, to push back with faith, love, and light against what we see as a tidal wave of corruption and self-interest; the frustration that comes from feeling directionless and alone in our efforts; and the hope that, working together, we can actually make a difference.”⁸

Well, those early days were wild and heady. Hundreds of smart, strong, energized women were pouring into the group every single day, heeding President Russell M. Nelson’s call for women to “speak up and speak out,”⁹ and they were ready for action, and eager to share their thoughts and ideas. We had no moderators at that point and no system for screening new members. But thank goodness our inviolable guiding principles were in place! Melissa, Erica, and I were working, very literally around the clock, trying to stay on top of member and post approvals, moderate the discussions, and put in place a structure and organization that could accommodate thousands of women who were ready to roll! Very quickly, we brought others on board to help: fellow writers Linda Hoffman Kimball and Michelle Lehnardt, and Jacque White, a business leader. We also recruited our first lifesaving team of discussion group moderators: Nicole Terry,

7. Post in MWEG’s Facebook Discussion Group, February 6, 2017.

8. *The Little Purple Book: MWEG Essentials* (Salt Lake City: BCC Press, 2018), 2.

9. Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign* 45, no. 11 (November 2015): 97.

Courtney McQuain, Jillaire McMillan, MaryJan Munger, Megan Lagerberg, and Maren E. Mecham. (Within the first few months, Erica, Michelle, and Jacque had to step away from active leadership because of competing life demands, and Diana Bate Hardy, an attorney, joined Melissa, Linda, and me as an invaluable member of the core leadership team.)

Right out of the gate, we were organizing committees and chapters, designing logos and other graphics, issuing calls to action, building a website, researching how to incorporate as a 501(c)(4), and, and, and . . . *And* we were already in the trenches, doing the work that we had all felt so called to do—organizing vigils, advocating for families who were being torn apart by unjust immigration practices, meeting with members of Congress, writing op-eds, helping register voters, and so on.

As Melissa so aptly put it, we were racing at breakneck speed down the autobahn, building the car as we went. Thanks to that early direct inspiration, we had a motor, a steering wheel, and a solid chassis—but we did not yet have doors, or bumpers, or brakes!

Yet we managed to hold the road. Within the first few weeks, we already had functioning committees in place, chapter coordinators in nearly every state, and a whole team of remarkable, committed leaders. We had claimed our privilege and were making our voices heard.

Early Media Attention

The initial plan was to work more or less behind the scenes. We did not want to draw attention to ourselves. Rather, we wanted the focus to be on the issues, the work, the cause of ethical government. Very soon, however, we discovered that flying under the radar was going to be virtually impossible. Our first public action, in April 2017, was a prayer vigil at the Salt Lake City airport on behalf of a woman who was being deported back to Colombia. Teresa was a faithful member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the sole caregiver to her disabled son, a U.S. citizen, and her elderly mother, a legal permanent resident. Teresa was a woman of the highest moral character who worked, paid taxes, had medical insurance that covered her son's needs, and had no criminal record of any kind. Teresa had entered the country legally many years before but had overstayed her visa (not a criminal offense). Because of her son's medical situation, her exemplary character, and her family ties in the United States, Teresa was granted deferred action (meaning that she was permitted to stay in the United States as long as she maintained her clean record, continued to demonstrate good moral character, and reported regularly to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

(ICE)—which she faithfully did, without exception). Over the years, Teresa was granted stays of deportation at each appointment—until early 2017. She was told then that “priorities have changed” and that she had just a few weeks to leave the country.

We wanted to follow the lead of the Church in calling for more humane immigration policies that “strengthen families and keep them together,”¹⁰ so we organized the prayer vigil at the airport on the morning that Teresa, flanked by ICE agents, was placed on a plane to Colombia, leaving her heartbroken son and mother behind, without insurance or any of the essential support she had always provided for them.

Despite our best efforts to keep the event firmly focused on Teresa and the immigration practices that were tearing her from her son and mother, the headlines in the local press instead highlighted our own identity: “Mormon Women, Others Gather at Salt Lake City Airport to Try ‘Last-Minute Save’ for Woman’s Deportation” and “LDS Women Protest Deportation at Salt Lake Airport.”¹¹

Our next public event was a vigil held in front of the Department of Homeland Security offices in West Valley City on behalf of Silvia, a Dreamer who had come to the United States as a seven-year-old child, had lived here her entire life, was married to a legal permanent resident (now a citizen), and was the mother of three young children, all three U.S. citizens. The event was covered by every major news outlet in the state of Utah as well as by *USA Today* and *Public Radio International*.¹² Soon we were being contacted by writers and journalists from publications as wide-ranging as *California Sunday Magazine*, *The Washington Examiner*,

10. “Church Calls for Unity, Compassion in New Statement on Immigration,” Church News, June 18, 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/church-calls-for-unity-compassion-in-new-statement-on-immigration?lang=eng>.

11. Mariah Noble, “Mormon Women, Others Gather at Salt Lake City Airport to Try ‘Last-Minute Save’ for Woman’s Deportation,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 7, 2017, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=5146762&itype=CMSID>; Erik Neumann, “LDS Women Protest Deportation at Salt Lake Airport,” KUER 90.1, April 6, 2017, radio report, 1:59, <https://www.kuer.org/immigration/2017-04-06/lds-women-protest-deportation-at-salt-lake-airport#stream/0>.

12. “Groups Protest Pending Deportation of Utah Mother of 3,” *USA Today*, May 3, 2017, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/utah/articles/2017-05-03/groups-protest-pending-deportation-of-utah-mother-of-3>; Andrea Smardon, “Trump’s Policies Have Turned Some Mormon Women in Utah into Political Activists,” *Public Radio International*, June 7, 2017, radio report, 4:43, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-06-07/trumps-policies-have-turned-some-mormon-women-utah-political-activists>.

and *Jyllands-Posten*, a leading Danish newspaper.¹³ Eventually, MWEG was even featured in two books—*Thin Places: Essays from in Between* by Jordan Kisner and *On the Road in Trump's America: A Journey into the Heart of a Divided Nation* by Daniel Allott.¹⁴

It became clear that, in the eyes of the national media, at least, we were the story—faithful Mormon women (often stereotyped throughout history as submissive and repressed) who were speaking up and taking action. We quickly came to realize that we could leverage this unwanted attention for good and that one of our strengths lay in subverting that stereotype. It is what gave us the platform to advance our cause.

The Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court nomination hearings brought further national attention to MWEG, particularly after Senator Cory Booker read one of our official statements during the proceedings and formally entered it into the hearing records.¹⁵ The statement, which took no position on Kavanaugh's guilt or innocence, called for a thorough investigation given the seriousness of the allegations against him: "If these accusations are proved false, an investigation will prevent harm to the court's legitimacy. If they are true, then Judge Kavanaugh must not be confirmed."¹⁶

Major articles followed in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *TIME* magazine, *The Hill*, *HuffPost*, *World Religion News*, *Religion and Politics*, and more.¹⁷

13. Jordan Kisner, "Mormon Women Join the Trump Resistance," *California Sunday Magazine*, September 25, 2017, <https://story.californiasunday.com/mormon-trump/>; Daniel Allott, "Meet the Women of the Mormon Resistance against Trumpism," *Washington Examiner*, March 20, 2018, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/tag/donald-trump?source=%2Fopininion%2Fmeet-the-women-of-the-mormon-resistance-against-trump>.

14. Jordan Kisner, *Thin Places: Essays from in Between* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 145–62; Daniel Allott, *On the Road in Trump's America: A Journey into the Heart of a Divided Nation* (Alexandria, Va.: Republic Book Publishers, 2020), 162–81.

15. "Confirmation Hearing on the Nomination of Hon. Brett M. Kavanaugh to be an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States," second session, September 4–7, 27, 2018, serial no. J-115-61 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2020), 2736, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115shrg32765/html/CHRG-115shrg32765-pt2.htm>.

16. "Official Statement from Mormon Women for Ethical Government with Regard to the Brett Kavanaugh Confirmation Proceedings," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, September 24, 2018, <http://library.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/official-statement-from-mormon-women-for-ethical-government-with-regard-to-the-brett-kavanaugh-confirmation-proceedings/>.

17. Elizabeth Dias, "Mormon Women's Group Seeks Inquiry into Kavanaugh Allegations," *New York Times*, September 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/25/>

We learned in time, if not to embrace the attention, at least to use it to amplify our message.

The Ethos of MWEG

From the beginning, MWEG was meant to be a different kind of organization—a group that welcomed women from all across the political spectrum and was driven not by any partisan agenda but by an unwavering focus on ethics and a commitment to peacemaking, both of which were motivated by our discipleship to Jesus Christ. Through what can only be called a profoundly holy experience, we came to understand early on that a critical component of MWEG’s *raison d’être* is the schooling of God’s daughters—for purposes so vast and varied that we can’t even conceive of all of them. MWEG is to be a place of learning and growth as, together, her members practice the principles of peacemaking and learn how to be effective advocates and leaders.

Vision and Mission

MWEG’s early group description reads, “Mormon Women for Ethical Government (MWEG) is a nonpartisan group dedicated to the ideals of decency, honor, accountability, transparency, and justice in governing. We are faithful, peaceful, and proactive. We are both watchdogs

[us/politics/kavanaugh-mormon-women.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/kavanaugh-mormon-women.html); Michelle Boorstein, “Mormon Women Demand LDS Senators Halt Kavanaugh Hearings So Misconduct Allegations Can Be Investigated,” *Washington Post*, September 25, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2018/09/25/mormon-women-demand-lds-senators-halt-kavanaugh-hearings-so-misconduct-can-be-investigated/>; Haley Sweetland Edwards, “How Christine Blasey Ford’s Testimony Changed America,” *TIME*, October 4, 2018, <https://time.com/5415027/christine-blasey-ford-testimony/>; Chris Mills Rodrigo, “Mormon Women Call on Senators to Postpone Kavanaugh Confirmation,” *The Hill*, September 25, 2018, <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/408264-mormon-womens-group-calls-on-senate-to-postpone-kavanaugh>; Nick Visser, “Mormon Women’s Group Calls on LDS Senators to Investigate Claims against Kavanaugh,” *HuffPost*, September 25, 2018, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mormon-women-kavanaugh_n_5baadc6ee4bofi43d10e5cae; Elisa Meyer, “Mormon Women’s Group Calls on LDS Senators to Investigate Claims against Kavanaugh,” *World Religion News*, September 27, 2018, <https://www.worldreligionnews.com/religion-news/mormon-womens-group-calls-lds-senators-investigate-claims-kavanaugh>; Kristine Wright, “What the Brett Kavanaugh Protests Revealed about Mormonism and Women,” *Religion and Politics*, October 9, 2018, <https://religionandpolitics.org/2018/10/09/what-the-brett-kavanaugh-protests-revealed-about-mormonism-and-women/>.

and activists, guided by our discipleship to Jesus Christ and His teachings. Our goal is to oppose unethical proceedings and to promote positive change.”¹⁸

We later formalized a more concise vision—“Women of faith building a more peaceful, just, and ethical world”—and mission statement—“To inspire women of faith to be ambassadors of peace who transcend partisanship and courageously advocate for ethical government.”¹⁹

Core Attributes

MWEG was and continues to be unconditionally bound to her commitment to be faithful, nonpartisan, peaceful, and proactive.²⁰ These four core attributes are further elucidated on MWEG’s website as follows:

- As a function of *Faithful*, MWEG will never oppose a stand taken by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, nor will we criticize the Church or Church leadership. We also recognize God’s hand in the formation of MWEG and continue to seek God’s guidance in all we do. We believe in, exercise faith in, and seek to reflect in our own lives the example of Jesus Christ.
- As a function of *Nonpartisan*, we will abide by the MWEG principles of nonpartisanship and will continue to remain open to members of all political parties who are willing to abide by our basic principles and guidelines. We will not ever endorse political candidates or take overtly partisan stands. In MWEG, we are defined not by labels but by our common commitment to ethics.
- As a function of *Peaceful*, we will strive to abide by the Six Principles of Peacemaking and will remain absolutely committed to civility in the true sense of the word—not mere politeness, but a deep and genuine honor and respect for every other human being that emerges from an acknowledgement that we are all children of the same God and, hence, sisters and brothers. We are committed to elevating the level of public discourse and healing the divide and will not countenance ad hominem attacks or vitriol of any kind.

18. *Little Purple Book*, 1.

19. “About Us: Who We Are,” MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/aboutus>.

20. “Inviolable Principles and Practices of Mormon Women for Ethical Government,” MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/inviolable-principles-and-practices>.

- As a function of *Proactive*, we assert that our purpose is to take effective action after appropriate and prayerful discussion, research, and strategizing. We were established to be both watchdogs and activists for ethical government.²¹

Focus on Ethical Government

MWEG's focus is on ethics and ethical government. As much as our members care about a plethora of other important issues, if it doesn't have anything to do with ethical government, it's not something MWEG will address. Early on, we formulated some clear advocacy guidelines. MWEG's focus on ethical government meant that the organization would do all it could to (1) guard against corruption and the abuse of power in government; (2) uphold democratic principles, norms, and institutions; and (3) protect the basic human rights and dignity of all God's children.

Eventually, with MWEG senior directors Rachel Esplin Odell and Lisa Rampton Halverson as primary drafters, our leadership team framed MWEG's Principles of Ethical Government, which are organized around these three basic concepts:

1. Every government official and institution has a duty to respect the rule of law, including accepted processes for how the law is to be established, executed, and interpreted.
2. Every human being is endowed with rights that governments are obligated to protect and not violate. These include both universal human rights such as the rights to life and liberty, as well as civil rights such as the rights to equitable political representation and equal protection under the law.
3. All human beings are mutually accountable to their fellow human beings in their local communities, their countries, and the world.²²

These are the principles that currently guide all of our advocacy decisions.

21. "Inviolable Principles and Practices," emphasis added.

22. "Principles of Ethical Government," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/principles-of-ethical-government>.

Principles of Peacemaking

While the Principles of Ethical Government inform *what* we do, our foundational Principles of Peacemaking guide *how* we do it.

As I noted earlier, while setting up the Facebook group January 26, 2017, I felt prompted to stipulate that anyone joining the group must agree to abide by the Six Principles of Nonviolence as defined and practiced by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.²³ (I was familiar with the writings and philosophy of Dr. King from teaching his texts, specifically his masterful “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” in a writing and rhetoric class that I taught for many years at Brigham Young University.)

The idea of nonviolence as a political practice has evolved over time, and the general principles of nonviolence have been adapted by many individuals and movements to fit their own circumstances and world-views. For example, Dr. King was influenced by and adapted the ideas of Gandhi, who was influenced by both Hindu philosophy and the writings of Henry David Thoreau, and so on. Fairly early in MWEG’s history, we too decided to adapt the principles of nonviolence and frame our own Six Principles of Peacemaking. These six principles are as follows:

1. Peacemaking is proactive and courageous.
2. Peacemaking seeks to unify instead of divide.
3. Peacemaking demands great tolerance for people and none for injustice.
4. Peacemaking views human suffering as sacred.
5. Peacemaking chooses love instead of hate.
6. Peacemaking believes that ultimate peace is not only possible, but sure.²⁴

As members of MWEG, we truly believe that, to use the powerful words of Dr. King, “darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”²⁵

As I wrote in an article that was published in the *New York Times* in 2020, as members of MWEG, “we believe that Jesus really meant it when he said that we should love our neighbors—and that means everyone, as the parable of the good Samaritan makes clear—and care for the poor, the

23. “Six Principles of Nonviolence.”

24. *Little Purple Book*, 13–16.

25. Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 37.

sick, the homeless, the vulnerable. This is the calling of all Christians. We have been called to love.”²⁶ MWEG’s vision—a more peaceful, just, and ethical world—is just another way of saying that the ultimate goal of MWEG is Zion, or what Dr. King called the Beloved Community.

Organizational Model

The founder and founding members of MWEG clearly understood that our call was to create a different kind of organization—an organization specifically for women and for the schooling of God’s daughters. This meant that we needed an organizational model that reflected the way women work. It was to be built “not after the manner of men”²⁷ but after the manner of women. As part of our schooling, we were to see and do things in a new way, a way that deliberately rejected the traditional male-dominated, hierarchal model of corporate America.

This meant there would be no centralization of authority, no top-down chain of command in MWEG. Rather, this was to be an organization of the members, by the members, for the members. It was to be based on the notions of individual empowerment, stewardship spheres, cooperation, mentorship, transparency, and accountability.

On June 6, 2017, approximately four months after the group was created, I elaborated on this idea in a post in the MWEG Facebook Discussion Group and described the organizational model that we settled on (this model was later formalized in *The Little Purple Book*):

As we’ve continued to evolve at MWEG, we’ve spent a lot of time thinking, praying, and talking about how we might best structure our organization. We even consulted with experts in the fields of business management and organizational design. But all the talk of hierarchy, top-to-bottom management, etc., just didn’t feel right. One day I took a brisk early morning walk. Winter had turned to spring without me really even noticing. (Hmmm. Wonder what has kept me so pre-occupied since, oh, say, January 26th!) I took particular notice of the trees. Glorious trees—birches, maples, aspens, oaks—rising up from the nourishing ground toward the sun. Roots, trunks, branches, leaves.

26. Sharlee Mullins Glenn, “Why I Became an Activist against Fear,” *New York Times*, February 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/19/opinion/mormons-religion-trump.html>.

27. See 1 Nephi 18:2.

And it hit me. MWEG is like a tree—organic, synergistic, cooperative. . . . It's not a perfect analogy (and like most analogies, it will break down at some point if pushed too far), but it's a useful visual for us, I think.²⁸

MWEG's organizational model, then, was to be not a pyramid but a tree. Our roots—MWEG's four core attributes (faithful, nonpartisan, peaceful, proactive)—are guarded by senior directors (root directors, in MWEG parlance). The strong, sturdy trunk, overseen by an executive team, houses our internal support teams. The limbs, cared for by limb directors, embody the broad arms of MWEG's four core objectives (to encircle, educate, empower, and engage). And each individual member is a leaf, gathering light and producing life-sustaining energy.

In this model, the members themselves have the responsibility of oversight—of ensuring that the organization stays true to its inviolable principles and practices.²⁹

Challenges

To say that all has been smooth sailing with MWEG would be disingenuous. The early days were challenging, not only because we were attempting to build the organization as we went (at breakneck speed!) but because we had to help all our members (and the public) understand that we really were serious about our foundational principles and practices. Our focus really is going to be limited to ethical government. We really do plan to unabashedly identify ourselves as women of faith who are guided in our advocacy by our discipleship to Jesus Christ, and we really are going to honor and sustain the Church's leaders and doctrines. We truly are going to try our best to be nonpartisan and to make space for any woman who is willing to abide by our principles and guidelines and work for ethical government, no matter her political party affiliation or lack thereof. We truly are going to actively practice kindness and deep civility and strive to be transformed by the principles of peacemaking.

Fairly quickly, we lost the women who just did not agree with our approach or who wanted MWEG to take positions that aligned consistently with their own partisan agendas. (We were neither liberal enough for the far left nor conservative enough for the far right.)

28. Post in MWEG Discussion Group, June 6, 2017. This model was later formalized in *Little Purple Book*, 17–18.

29. See "Inviolable Principles and Practices."

Protecting the integrity of our original vision and mission has continued to be a challenge as new members join MWEG and as the founders have stepped back to allow others to assume the key leadership positions. This is one reason we memorialized our founding precepts in what we call MWEG's Inviolable Principles and Practices.³⁰

Another challenge has been ensuring diversity within our board and operational leadership team, and we hope that MWEG will continue to make this a priority by working to establish trust and inviting greater participation—within both MWEG's leadership and her general membership—from women of color, women of various ages, women from across the political spectrum, and women from various geographic regions.

It has been fairly disappointing to learn that women-led groups are not exempt from some of the same tendencies and pitfalls that have always plagued largely male-run organizations. Further, just because an organization is focused on ethical government does not mean that it will not at times grapple with ethical dilemmas of its own or be tempted to compromise on ethical standards in its own governance.

As we transitioned from a founders-led organization to one with a governing board and a robust operating team, one fairly significant hurdle we encountered was the difficulty of integrating MWEG's unique organizational model with traditional paradigms for board governance. It can be tricky to challenge the status quo and reject familiar practices in order to implement a different kind of vision, particularly one that is not one's own, and our attorney advisors were not always encouraging of thinking outside the box. As a result, communicating MWEG's bold and unique vision to new leaders who come with their own set of ideas and backgrounds has not always been easy or fully successful.

There have also been some missed opportunities to fully develop certain aspects of MWEG's vision. The notion of mentorship, for example, is a critical component of MWEG's philosophy. As MWEG moves forward, we hope to see more opportunities for ongoing mentorship, as opposed to the "calling" type of system LDS Church members are familiar with, where leaders are released and immediately dismissed when new leaders are called. Sister Aileen H. Clyde—former member of the Relief Society General Presidency, recipient of MWEG's first Woman of Valor award, and enthusiastic member and advisor of MWEG until her passing³¹—

30. See "Inviolable Principles and Practices."

31. See Margaret Blair Young, "Aileen Clyde: Leader, Counselor, Sister," *The Welcome Table*, blog, January 5, 2020, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/welcometable/2020/01/aileen-clyde-leader-counselor-sister/>.

spoke often about her frustrations with transitions in Church callings. In MWEG, we have an opportunity to implement a true mentorship model that provides ongoing support and tutelage for new leaders and builds upon the experience and institutional knowledge of outgoing leaders.

Even with these challenges, though, we remain hopeful that MWEG will continue to learn and grow as she seeks to fulfill the measure of her creation.

Moving Forward

Despite the unavoidable challenges, in the five years of MWEG's existence, it has not only survived but flourished. MWEG, a 501(c)(4) nonprofit with an affiliated 501(c)(3) sister organization (The MWEG Foundation), now has nearly seven thousand members and even more supporters and friends. As founder, I served as the first executive director on a completely volunteer basis for nearly two years until November 2018, when Diana Bate Hardy took the reins while MWEG's board of directors worked to raise the funds to support a permanent full-time executive director.³² Diana was a visionary leader who worked hard to flesh out and solidify the formal structure of the organization. A trained attorney with significant experience in immigration law, Diana also led out on immigration efforts and drafted MWEG's "A Citizen's Proposal for Fair and Ethical Immigration Reform."³³

At the time of this publication, MWEG is led by co-executive directors Emma Petty Addams and Jennifer Walker Thomas. The organization has an active board of directors and a healthy operational leadership team. We have successfully launched significant, impactful initiatives such as "Protecting Democracy," "Protect the Vote," and "Shoulder to Shoulder"³⁴ and have plans for new initiatives focused on practical peacemaking and what it means to be a principled citizen. MWEG hosts

32. See Scarlett Lindsay, "Pushing for Immigration Reform," *The BYU Advocate* (Fall 2019): 44–45.

33. Mormon Women for Ethical Government, "A Citizens' Solution for Ethical Immigration Reform," Medium, January 11, 2019, <https://medium.com/on-common-ground/a-citizens-solution-for-ethical-immigration-reform-edae1ea68f02>.

34. "Protecting Democracy: Calls to Action," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/protectourdemocracy>; "Protect the Vote," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/protect_the_vote; "Shoulder to Shoulder: Calls to Action," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/shouldertoshoulderCTAs>.

weekly “GROW” and “Town Halls and Deep Dives” meetings; sponsors an annual conference; maintains a vibrant website; supports an active internal discussion group as well as public-facing Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts; participates in voter registration efforts; partners with other like-minded organizations; maintains an ongoing focus on media literacy; and has issued numerous carefully researched “Calls to Action.” MWEG members have published hundreds of op-eds in papers across the country, including in the *New York Times*,³⁵ *The Hill*,³⁶ and *USA Today*.³⁷ MWEG has been invited to help plan and participate in national and international events such as the National Institute for Civil Discourse’s Golden Rule 2020 campaign,³⁸ the National Summit for Democracy,³⁹ the United Nation’s “Ethics of Reciprocity Interfaith Dialogue,”⁴⁰ and the 2021 National Inaugural Prayer Service.⁴¹

And the list goes on.

MWEG has made a mark and is here to stay.

There will always be a need for peacemakers, advocates, and watchdogs for ethical government, no matter who occupies the White House

35. See Glenn, “Why I Became an Activist against Fear.”

36. See Diana Bate Hardy, “Congress, Passing DACA Is Now a Moral Responsibility,” *The Hill*, September 15, 2017, <https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/350889-congress-passing-daca-is-now-a-moral-responsibility?fbclid=IwAR1Dvbp5U-YtEFESDk1n1ocmWl9PQ1ds48xVfibmXJJgaZU9rcpdzD4OXhI>; Diana Bate Hardy, “Know the Issues in This Election,” *The Hill*, September 25, 2020, <https://thehill.com/opinion/civil-rights/518283-know-the-issues-in-this-election>; Diana Bate Hardy, “Apathy Could Be Our Biggest Challenge This National Voter Registration Day,” *The Hill*, September 26, 2017, <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/352347-apathy-could-be-our-biggest-challenge-this-national-voter-registration-day>.

37. Emma Petty Adams, “Joe Biden Asked Me to Pray for America. I Said Yes Because I Value the Truth,” *USA Today*, January 24, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/01/24/my-prayer-joe-bidens-inauguration-america-pursue-truth-column/6668726002/?fbclid=IwARokeMARTyG7s8o7PnuX6XX5FqFTHCsaxflgdzbNQ1acbJOOp775t8-gA28>; Sharlee Mullins Glenn and Jennifer Fuentes Langi, “Congress Could Help This Young Mom and Other Families Trapped in an Immigration Catch-22,” *USA Today*, March 26, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/03/26/fix-immigration-bars-to-reentry-that-separate-families-column/4762940001/>.

38. Golden Rule 2020, <https://goldenrule2020.org/>.

39. National Summit for Democracy, 2019, <https://www.summitfordemocracy.com/>.

40. “Ethics of Reciprocity: A United Nations Historic Interfaith Dialogue,” Global Interfaith Network, <https://gin-ssogie.org/uncategorized/ethics-of-reciprocity-a-united-nations-historic-interfaith-dialogue/>.

41. “The National Prayer Service for the Fifty-Fifth Presidential Inaugural,” January 21, 2021, https://cathedral.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final-Program-2021-Inaugural-Prayer-Service-1-21_compressed.pdf.

or controls Congress. The great hope of the founder and founding members is that MWEG will continue to be vigilant in guarding against corruption and the abuse of power, in defending democracy, in advocating for the human rights and dignity of all our sisters and brothers, and in being proactive makers of peace. In many ways, the hard work of repairing rifts, building unity, and working toward Zion has only just begun.

Sharlee Mullins Glenn has published articles, poetry, criticism, and short stories in periodicals as varied as *The Southern Literary Journal*, *Women's Studies*, *Ladybug*, and the *New York Times*. She is also an award-winning author of children's books, including *Just What Mama Needs* (Harcourt, 2008), *Keeping up with Roo* (Putnam, 2004), and, most recently, *Library on Wheels: Mary Lemist Titcomb and America's First Bookmobile* (Abrams, 2018), winner of the 2020 Norman A. Sugarman Children's Biography Honor Award. In 2017, Sharlee founded the nonpartisan, nonprofit organization Mormon Women for Ethical Government and served as its executive director for two years. She currently sits on the external advisory board of BYU's Office of Civic Engagement and volunteers for Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS). Sharlee and her husband have five above-average children and six (soon to be seven) perfect grandchildren.