

Intro Music:	00:16	[Inaudible].
Josh Mangelson:	00:17	Welcome to the Project Zion podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.
Intro Music:	00:32	[Inaudible]
Linda Booth:	00:33	Welcome everyone to a new podcast series called Coffee Buzz. I'm Linda Booth, retired Community of Christ apostle and Coffee Buzz podcast host. We often associate the word buzz with gossip or the sound that a be makes, "buzzzzzz". Coffee Buzz isn't gossip and you'll never hear a bees buzzing in the background. What you will hear, however, is something new. Coffee Buzz is an intimate conversation with a member of the Community of Christ's First Presidency. So today I'm talking with President Stassi Crramm a counselor to the President and Prophet Steve Veazey. She also wears other hats, one of which is Presiding Bishop. Welcome Stassi, my dear friend. I know that you and your husband Steve, have been traveling some this summer especially to visit your son Spencer, who lives in Japan and your daughter Shannon, who lives in Boston.
Stassi Cramm:	01:40	Yes, we have. We've had a great summer. It's always good to get to go see your kids and to watch them experiencing life at its fullest.
Linda Booth:	01:48	And it's good to have children that are grown and now can earn their own livings and are on their own. You've succeeded!
Stassi Cramm:	01:56	That's how we can afford to go see them.
Linda Booth:	01:59	Exactly. Well, I want to talk to you today about a variety of things. And the first one I'm going to talk to you about is the fact that you have served perhaps the only one in church history that is served in a major leadership role in three quorums, the Council of Twelve, the Presiding Bishopric and the First Presidency. And I'm just gonna ask, are there any one of those experiences that you think that you are, you're gifted to us was most closely aligned?
Stassi Cramm:	02:33	Yeah, that's a great question. Sometimes I like to tease and say that I've jumped around quorums because I couldn't hold down a job, but hopefully that's not what history will write. I think that each of the quorums have given me an opportunity to,uto share my giftedness in different ways. And so I feel like when I first came into Presiding Bishopric back in 2002, that was a

chance to, to learn about the church on a world scale beyond just the local mission center where I was providing leadership to learn about the finances as a church to understand how those finances are connected with mission. But even as I served in that role, I had this really compelling interest in the mission of the church and how that was being lived out, so when my call came to join the Council of Twelve, my heart leapt a little bit.

Stassi Cramm: [03:34](#)

It was sad to leave behind the Presiding Bishopric role, but it was also exciting to, to come and join you and others who had gone before me in getting to serve as a minister of mission through the Council of Twelve. And I loved the opportunity to be with the people, to provide support to mission center leaders, to work with priesthood, to struggle with congregations. Just the whole experience of that, and now in the, in the Presidency, I feel like I'm bringing everything with me, what I learned previously in the Presiding Bishopric, what I learned about the church and its needs out in the field. And now I'm having the opportunity to support President Veazey in his role as our prophet, you know, trying to cast that vision for the Church of what it needs to be and become in the days ahead.

Linda Booth: [04:29](#)

Well, I wish our listeners could see your face because it's just as glowing as you talk about each one of those experiences. And I have a sense that you had a passion for each one of those.

Stassi Cramm: [04:39](#)

Yeah, I mean, in some ways, each call came as a little bit of a surprise. I think sometimes I'm just so busy doing whatever it is that I'm currently doing that I don't really stop and think about. Well, what's going to come next? In fact, my least favorite question in any interview is, well, what are your plans for the next five years? So in that regard, every time one of these calls came, it, it took me a little bit by surprise and I'd always have to think, oh my gosh, seriously? You know, let me go talk to my husband, let me go pray about this. But each of those calls over time, I felt like I had this assurance of the presence of the Spirit. And to be honest, even at times when sometimes the call gets really burdensome and you want to run from it I have this prevailing awareness of God's presence with me and I'm just so grateful for that.

Linda Booth: [05:33](#)

Oh yes, absolutely. God is always near, right?

Stassi Cramm: [05:37](#)

Absolutely.

Linda Booth: [05:38](#)

Yeah. So one of the functions in the Council of Twelve, you served as the team lead in the USA team of apostles. And I need

to explain to the listeners that the Council of Twelve has two functioning teams. One is the multi-nation team that has apostles who serve in countries or mission centers outside of the United States. And then there's another team that specifically has apostles that serve in United States. And so when we served on that team, we actually set in the room in this very room where Stassi and I are now talking just in the Council of Twelve suite in a small little room. And we did a lot of planning for the National Conference. And you led that process. Please describe that remarkable time in the life of the church as well as the significance of that process for the church in the United States.

Stassi Cramm:

[06:38](#)

Yeah, that was an amazing journey. And it also had times where it was very burdensome. I remember sitting in this room as we literally cried sometimes, worrying about how the process would unfold and you know, wanting the very best for the church and for the people and wanting to provide a process that would allow everyone to respectfully engage each other in listening to each other's perspectives and life journeys to listen together to the leadings of the Holy Spirit, to remain open to what they were hearing and to try to discover where God was guiding us. And that seemed like a really monumental task. We were really blessed by the work that the common consent team had done. And Kelly Phipps in particular provided some early guidance to us. And Linda, you would remember that he provided as kind of a draft outline and then he basically said, okay, at this point you guys really have to take this and make it your own.

Stassi Cramm:

[07:47](#)

And and so we would write and lay things out and we had flow diagrams and then we would come into this room and people would tear it apart. And so, and then some of us would go back out and say, okay, let's take all this feedback and see what we can come up with next. Through the process though, I do feel like that we were, we were blessed in really special ways. I think we demonstrated the importance of how the church can journey focused on a particular question. And even though there's always a desire to come to a quick answer, if we will use the six lenses that the church teaches for how to discover God's will, that we will make a more, you know, informed faith-based decision. It was also in this room where we drafted the principles of a faithful disagreement.

Stassi Cramm:

[08:45](#)

And I remember that came out of this, this deep sense of understanding that no matter what the outcome of the conference was, there would be some, would not value the conclusion. And so the question was how could we journey

together even when we have those moments of disagreement? And we wanted to uphold that everyone was motivated by the same call and passion for the Church's mission. And I think the Faithful Disagreement Principles have been a real blessing to the church. And I've seen them put to use in a lot of scenarios that go way beyond just the topic of National Conference. So I think that was a really significant journey for the church. And I think it, it opened us to a new era of how to discern together, how to struggle with important questions together and how to make decisions when we need to make a decision, but still come together when we don't all agree.

Linda Booth: [09:43](#) Absolutely. And I remember that our team had some criticism from people who were viewing how we led the process. And one of the criticisms was that we didn't take a stand early on to say what our perspective was on saying gender marriages or covenants or even ordination. And we received criticism on that, but we stood firmly. What's your reflection on that decision not to speak out?

Stassi Cramm: [10:19](#) Yeah, that's, that's actually a great question. And in fact I'm looking at my notes and I had made a note about that. Cause I think a lot of times when we think of what the definition of a leader is, we think of a leader as being the one who articulated the direction or articulate the way forward. And I think historically there's been a lot of times when that is the role of leadership.

Stassi Cramm: [10:45](#) But I think what we discovered is that sometimes the role of leadership is to keep their personal opinions to themselves and to create an objective process that allows the will of the body to come together with the will of God and and define the way forward together. I think maybe that's a lot of what it means to be a prophetic people. And it was hard. I know we talked about a lot how sometimes we all wanted to just finally blurt out our own perspectives. And yet we had covenanted with each other and with the church that that's not what we were going to do and that we were committed to just providing a process that had integrity. And I'm so grateful now that that's what we did and that has really shaped and formed me in my current calling because I find that in the presidency we have to consider a lot of topics where obviously each one of us has a personal opinion, but ultimately we recognize that it's not about our personal opinion. It really is about asking the important questions. And allowing the church to struggle together to find what the best answer is for this, you know, a particular time and place.

Linda Booth: [12:09](#) Yes. And to trust in and God's spirit to be in our midst. Because I remember during those, was it four days we met was yeah, I think Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Yeah. I remember having that overwhelming sense, a humbling feeling that God was in our midst and even in the most difficult moments of conversation having to do with same gender issues, that there was this peace, it seemed to prevail even in the midst of questions and a little anxiety. Did you have that sense too?

Stassi Cramm: [12:52](#) Oh yeah, definitely. President Veazey says all the time there's wisdom when the body is gathered and and I've come to really appreciate that. Just, you know, brief observation and I think that's exactly what we experienced is that, that we came together and we were bound together through the spirit. And there was, you know, a palatable feeling, you know, to what was happening and and you could feel like the authenticity of everyone truly being concerned about the other, even if what they were saying that they didn't agree with what they were saying, you could still sense that there was this, you know, respect and mutual desire for that person to be a valued member of the body and people, you know, behaved wonderfully and you know, we had a few, you know, moments where tensions got a little high, but that's to be expected when people are passionate about a topic. But overall the body has tremendous wisdom when it opens itself up to the Spirit.

Linda Booth: [14:02](#) Absolutely. And, and, and even when I read the results of the vote there wasn't celebration from those, the 80 plus percent of people who had agreed to allow for covenant relationships and ordinations. Because people were so concerned about those who might be hurting because of the vote.

Stassi Cramm: [14:31](#) Yeah, exactly. In fact, I think that's another kind of criticism that we got because obviously there were some who were ready to celebrate. And we're not necessarily present in the conference, but those who were present in the conference I think recognized the need to journey with the for a while and to allow the decision to, to come forth in the life of the church in a timing and a way that made space for those who were most uncomfortable with it. And I think it was an acknowledgement that we didn't want to swing from one extreme to another. You know, we didn't want to swing from a place where there were those who were being excluded to another place where there were those that were being excluded. And so everyone was trying to find that way of how do we make space for everyone? Yeah. So, yeah, quite an experience.

- Linda Booth: [15:27](#) It was a wonderful experience and I thank you on behalf of the church for the leadership that you provided that US team, because your leadership really was critical at that point in time with your organizational skills. And I know that you brought that into the First Presidency.
- Linda Booth: [15:42](#) Well thank you, Linda. Yes. So the First Presidency, which is made up of Steve Veazey, who's the President and Scott who is the Director of Field Ministry as well as also a counselor and yourself and, and also Sue Sloan who is the World Church Secretary. And, and you meet every Wednesday when everyone's in town. And if there is a typical kind of meeting, is there a typical meeting? If so, what's it like?
- Stassi Cramm: [16:15](#) Well, what's typical is that every meeting is atypical probably. But the common thread for Wednesdays is that we typically have Chipotle for lunch because we used to go out for lunch, but our agenda has just gotten more and more full. And so we've gotten to the point where we tend to order Chipotle, a John Bullard, bless his heart, tends to run out and pick it up for us so that we can kind of keep working through lunch. We always worship together, so that's always part of our experience. Sue manages our agenda. So we have kind of a running agenda that we collect, topics that need to be discussed. Sometimes those topics are operational and relatively simple and we can kind of just check them off and in fact we try to front load the agenda with those easy topics and then other topics require more prayer and study and reflection.
- Stassi Cramm: [17:15](#) And oftentimes those topics will continue over multiple weeks as we will. We will struggle with whatever that topic is and then we'll go off and think more about it, do more, you know, researching and then, you know, come back together. We also, as you know, often invite other people to join us during those meetings when we're talking about particular topics and, and have a standing appointment with the Director of Communications, which you so graciously served in for many years. So, you know, overall we try to keep the small things out the meeting and use the time for the really big things. We schedule additional time sometimes when we recognize that some topics are going to take maybe a whole day that we just really need to, you know, spend in it. And so we'll schedule extra time. But it really is a valuable time for us to all be together to kind of set aside our phones and email and other distractions and just be, you know, fully present with each other and the questions that we face.

- Linda Booth: [18:21](#) And you also set aside a schedule and retreat times too. I used to do that as well. Exactly. Especially before World Conference in preparation and then after World Conference with all the responsibilities that then end up on the First Presidency's plate following those World Countries.
- Stassi Cramm: [18:38](#) Yeah, exactly. World Conference by its three year nature basically becomes our planning horizon. So for us strategic planning, I mean we're always casting, you know, the vision and looking well what does the world look like, you know, 10, 15, 20 years from now and, and we feel like that's really important to keep things in context. But when it comes down to the practical step-by-steps, it's really what hat needs to happen between now and the next world conference, which is now less than three years away.
- Linda Booth: [19:09](#) Yes, yes, I know. Daunting perspective to think about isn't it? When I've been invited to join some of those Wednesday meetings when I was Director of Communications and sometimes in my role as President of the Council of Twelve, I've always was impressed with the genuine friendship that the three of you shared. I mean, it was just very evident that you just love each other, you like each other, you love each other. Did that camaraderie happen instantly when you first joined the First residency or did it take some time and effort?
- Stassi Cramm: [19:47](#) Well, a little bit of both. I got to come around the table before I actually was officially in the first presidency. So Becky and Scott, who are the counselors at the time, and then Steve invited me to start participating after my call had been announced so that I could sort of learn, you know, what was going on and how get prepared for the world conference. I remember the first couple of times that I showed up. It was it felt really daunting. And I don't know, maybe you felt that way the first couple times you had to come into the conference room and sit at the table. You know, I think we think all the time about, you know, the First Presidency and what they do when they're together. I guess in some ways I always go back to school imagery cause I think a lot of my, my, you know, stress images are from, you know, being a student and so it's like, oh my gosh, I'm in like the principal's conference room. I've got to be on my best behavior.
- Stassi Cramm: [20:48](#) So, you know, it was, it was just really interesting. I was just really mindful of kind of feeling like I was shifting into this, you know, place of, of reverence and respect, which I'm sure all three of them would roll their eyes. Now if they heard me say that. But over time and especially after conference when I was officially a member of the first presidency, and especially when

in those early days, we were really facing a lot of breaking information about financial circumstances of the church. And I realized that I had to come to the table and offer my very best and I had to kind of sit set aside my anxiety or my, you know, fear or my desire to just kind of sit back and just watch and observe. And I had to, you know, bring the best that I had to offer.

Stassi Cramm:

[21:42](#)

I think because those early days were so filled with some really traumatic experiences that, that maybe accelerated the comradery. I think it's human nature that whenever you go through tough times together that it has a way of, of deepening your relationship. You know, it's just like families when you argue together and yet know that you're arguing isn't personal or isn't out, you know, about each other. But it's coming out of the passion and frustration, you know, of the circumstances. So you know, when you cry together, when you laugh together that has a way of, of bonding you together. I just have tremendous respect for both Scott and Steve and I'm so grateful for, and Becky, I mean, Becky was a wonderful mentor as they came into the role and you know, she was so gracious and you know, I mean sometimes leadership transitions can be awkward cause you know, people maybe are struggling to let go and she, she just like threw open her arms and shared everything you know, she could about, you know, about the dynamics, about you know, how to be effective, all those kinds of things. And, and one of the joys of, of the position, you would know this, in the Council of Twelve, you have 11 other people, but you're not together very often. So sometimes you really do feel sort of like an island. And the nice thing about the Presidency is I feel really connected and part of a team and I really enjoy that.

Linda Booth:

[23:19](#)

Yes, we just spoke about family and, and when I'm in, what was in those meetings, it seemed like you and Scott in particular like brother and sister, you know how to poke each other and you joke with each other. And because I now have an office in as a volunteer in the First Presidency suite I often hear you walking down the hall to his office and then hear him going. And so I know you're doing or, I'm assuming you're doing a lot of collaboration having to do with administrative kinds of things and, and mission kinds of things. And so I was wondering how that interaction between the two of you benefits the first presidency as a team?

Stassi Cramm:

[24:04](#)

Yeah, so I suspect that every time a new quorum is formed each one has to kind of figure out their role. And it works a lot better when you figure that out together. So when Steve was sharing with Scott and I about his integrated leadership model and his

reasons for wanting the director of field ministry to be one of his counselors, which like you said, Scott is, and wanting the role of Presiding Bishop to also be a counselor. And around the table he said that his kind of dream and hope was that Scott and I could work closely together and basically carry the responsibility for the day to day operations of the church and the shorter strategic matters that need to be taken care of and that we could keep him informed as needed. But but then he wanted us to be free to make those decisions without his involvement so that he could have the benefit of taking a more long range focus on the vision of the church and do more, you know, research and prayerful consideration of, you know, those types of issues.

Stassi Cramm:

[25:20](#)

Now that doesn't mean that Scott and I aren't involved in those, but as you know administrative matters can just consume you. And so Scott and I have worked really hard to try to give Steve some extra space from that. And it took a while, but I think we've now gotten into that pattern where we know, you know, what's enough for him to, you know, be aware of and, and what do we, you know, not need to burden him with. And by doing that, I think he's been able to, to fulfill his role even more effectively in taking that longer range look, and he's just so good at, he brings like information back to the table. He gives us reading assignments. You know, so it's, so again, Scott and I get involved in that visionary work, but, but Steve is able to kind of focus us and guide us in how to do that.

Stassi Cramm:

[26:15](#)

Scott and I are definitely different people. We see the world differently. We don't always agree. We definitely know how to push each other's buttons. There have been moments where tempers have flared, but like you said, as brother and sister we always know that, that the heart of the other is just wanting what's, you know, in the best interest of the church and, you know, and we also started to know how, you know, I know how to duck when he swings and vice versa. You know, so we've created this rhythm and we say it's the church is better when neither one of us goes into a really dark space at the exactly the same time. So we try to balance out our highs and lows and our, our ultimate goal then is to not have to get to too many places where we can't resolve the issues ourselves and are forced to, you know, bring Steve back in. Steve was out of the office recently. He was at a reunion and then he was on vacation. And so basically it was out of the office for like three weeks. He's been back for about a week or so now. But almost every day something keeps coming up and it's like, oh yeah, we forgot while you were gone. And we keep having to tell him about different things and he's just like, just shakes his head. It's like,

oh my goodness. He like, well, I'm glad to know that you both stayed busy while I was gone.

- Linda Booth: [27:41](#) Yeah, I really believe this new way of the first presidency working together with the director of field ministries and the Presiding Bishopric as a member of that First Presidency team has freed the Prophet President to really be what I believe God intends his role to be. In past times as I've observed the President at some times was involved in some of the minutia of day to day operations, which is not what I believe God needs a leader of a faith movement. So I'm very thankful that you and Scott, both of your giftedness and the differences that you have and the different personalities that you both have, how that has come into the First Presidency. And I really believe it's not only blessed state, but it's in blessed the entire church.
- Stassi Cramm: [28:30](#) Oh, thanks Linda. Ultimately, Scott and I really are about empowering others. And so I think we have actually tried to move a lot of the operational decisions completely out of the Presidency suite. And in some ways that's different than it has been in the past. And so for some of the people who've been at headquarters for a long time that's still sometimes a little bit hard cause you know, they want everything to kind of roll up into the Presidency. And we've gotten really good about rolling it back out and saying, well, what do you think? You know, we want to support what you think. And, and so with Scott and I working together, I think we've been able to be more intentional about empowering others too. And I feel really good about that.
- Linda Booth: [29:15](#) You should. And I, and for what, who used to work with you, I, that was always a great benefit to know that you all trusted us to make decisions and to do what we thought was best.
- Stassi Cramm: [29:25](#) Absolutely.
- Linda Booth: [29:26](#) With our teams. Yeah. So there must be a lot of challenges.
- Stassi Cramm: [29:31](#) Just a few.
- Linda Booth: [29:31](#) And I know just a few. Yeah. You've spoken of a few of them and perhaps it's not even, you're not even able to say what are some of the greatest challenges have faced the three of you as a team?
- Stassi Cramm: [29:44](#) Yeah. you know, I think the greatest challenge is that we live in a world that is changing so rapidly. You know, I mean, you read

all of the same material that I read and so it's just hard to even wrap your mind around what is happening in the world and, and what the cultural trends are and what the behavioral trends are. And you know, we know that in the midst of all of that, that the gospel message is a constant. But how to deliver the gospel message, you know, continues to have to be adapted and, and altered and changed so that it can penetrate into that culture out there. You know, I think about like the story that I'm sure a lot of us have read about when the printing press first came into place and and the ability to print the Bible became somewhat commonplace and it really was challenging to a lot of the religious leaders of the time, cause it was just so strange to think that people could have access to the Bible.

Stassi Cramm: [30:57](#)

So it's not that the Bible message was changing, but how people could engage, it was changing. Well now those changes are happening so fast and and as a world church, we recognize, you know, that what's happening in Africa is related to but not identical to what's happening in India or in the United States or in Canada. Even, you know, the eastern part of the United States is different than the western part. And so as you know, the role of world church leaders is to try to help the church continue to, to become what it needs to be, to fulfill its mission in the context of today's world. And the presidency's role in that is to try to cast that vision and to hold steady our identity and mission and message and beliefs that are the constant that, that provide a true north for the church while remaining flexible and adaptable in how that gets experienced.

Stassi Cramm: [32:03](#)

And that's both a joy and a burden and no one can foretell the future. So we understand that the prophetic voice is not about for telling the future. The prophetic voice is about being honest and recognizing our current circumstances and failures and being repentant and visionary and considering how reconciliation and forgiveness and peace and justice can, can find space in the world to be planted and rooted and to grow.

Linda Booth: [32:42](#)

Yes. I wonder if that challenge has always been a part of the First President. Probably. Yeah. I suspect that every First Presidency probably feels like, oh my gosh, this time is so much more difficult than any other. And that's probably just the passion that each one and the commitment that each one brings, you know, to every role. I mean, even the role of pastor, I think every pastor probably feels that way. And it's that is that deep love and desire to be faithful people that I think brings all that forward.

- Linda Booth: [33:14](#) Absolutely. So you've talked a little, I mean, that is a huge challenge and I know there's many, many more challenges that each of you face individually and your role as well as, as a team of, of three members. Can you share a little bit of the joys that you're experienced as you've served in the First Presidency?
- Stassi Cramm: [33:34](#) Yeah. you know, there's, there's nothing like planning for, for a World Conference or we talked about the National Conference, but, and you know, thinking about all of the people that will be gathering and watching as all of the different teams that pull together a World Conference. So like the worship people and just all of those things wanting the very best, worrying about some of the difficult conversations and how those will go. So there's nothing like the final amen at a World Conference, the most joyful experience ever when that final amen is uttered. And a, you know, a positive experience has happened. So that's a really big one. But small ones are like, for instance, we got to meet with the priesthood during World Conference and we got a lot of emails about you know, people's gratitude, their sense of commitment, their desire to, you know, really want to fulfill their calls. And most of what we do is so small compared to all of, you know, the activities that are going on. But just being able to witness people at their best to watch them glimpse just a, just a little, you know, view of the possibilities of what God's kingdom on earth is turning to look like and how they might be able to participate in making that happen. That's all pretty joyful.
- Linda Booth: [35:03](#) It is joyful. Well, my dear friend thank you so much for sharing some of the joys and the challenges and the experiences that you've had as a leader in the church. And again, on behalf of the International Church that's in nearly 60 nations and speak so many different languages all over the world, I want to thank you for the tears and the laughter that you share on behalf of the church and for sharing your giftedness and your passion for the gospel. So thank you.
- Stassi Cramm: [35:38](#) Thank you, Linda I really appreciate it.
- Linda Booth: [35:41](#) And so watch for and listen to the next Coffee Buzz when I will be talking with First Presidency members, Scott Murphy. So stay tuned for another coffee bus. Thanks Stassi!
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Outro Music: [37:00](#) [Inaudible]
Speaker 5: [37:07](#) [Inaudible] [inaudible].