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Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 0:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Carla Long 0:33

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla long, and today I'm super excited to talk to John Hamer. This is a topic that I've been thinking about for like two years now because I'm going to tell the story about it, okay. So I was talking with a seeker and she said to me, she goes, so Carla, you're a bishop? I'm like, yeah, I'm a bishop! So then she then goes well, we're get your priesthood authority? And I go, uh from God. (laughter)

John Hamer 1:06

Good answer. (laughter)

Carla Long 1:09

She didn't like that answer at all she was she thought it was a little bit like, Um, no. I mean, where do you get to priesthood authority? And I had no idea what she meant. Like I literally had to contact somebody else and be like, Okay, what did she mean by this?

John Hamer 1:23

Right.

Carla Long 1:23

It was explained to me and hopefully you're going to also explain it as well, what she meant by that, where I got my priesthood authority, and why she thought my answer was wrong, and why I thought my answer was right. So today we're going to talk all about priesthood authority. So John, before we jump in, want don't you, well, you're probably no stranger to anyone on this podcast, but go introduce yourself and tell us a little about you.

John Hamer 1:48

Sure. My name is John Hamer. I serve in the priesthood calling 70 in Community of Christ. I also am pastor of the downtown Toronto congregattion here in Canada, and one of the things that we do here is our congregation right now. And the pandemic is kind of at the center of what we're kind of calling our global congregation, as we are producing streaming content every Sunday and Tuesday and Wednesday, and have as many as 1000 disciples and seekers around the planet in more than 50 countries who join with us for the services and it's just been very, you know, anyway, obviously, in the middle of very trying times, it's been one of the nice things that we've been able to achieve is come together in this new kind of way. And so that's

Carla Long 2:42

It's amazing! You guys.

John Hamer 2:44

Oh, thank you.

Carla Long 2:45

You've done a phenomenal job. I've been so impressed. It's been really, really good. Thank you. Yeah. So you're a busy guy. Let's be honest about that. You're definitely a busy guy.

John Hamer 2:55

I only have about 400 more slides to make before tomorrow in order to get the service ready. Yeah,

Carla Long 3:01

You have plenty of time. So, John, can we jump back to my little story?

John Hamer 3:07

Yes.

Carla Long 3:08

First of all, I guess overall What do we mean by priesthood authority when we say priesthood authority? Like not only the Mormons not necessarily us, what do we mean?

John Hamer 3:17

So we mean a lot of different things, unfortunately. And that's one of the reasons why we can have very much competing answers that talk right past each other. It's the same exact thing if you if you were to meet with a Born Again Christian, and they asked you are you born again? And we can just very easily sit in community pray, say, yes, you know, when I was baptized, I was born again because we understand that baptism as a as a sacrament and a covenant where we are born into the new new life and as part of the body of Christ. They have a different idea of what they mean by born again, right and so they have a there has to be a special moment. In life, we have a kind of emotional psychic, you know, internal response where you feel like you've been touched in a very particular way and have turned your life and it doesn't occur during a sacrament or, or an ordinance. It takes place, you know, as a direct contact with the Holy Spirit in their understanding of what that means and why that's essential. And so that's not to say what they're saying is bad or that that we shouldn't, that they couldn't you can't have an important spiritual experience like that. But that's not how we understand in Community of Christ anyway, the the phrase about being born again. And so in the same way, authority is also one of these questions that that Christians have been in debate about, and it actually has, has a long historical background. And so I can say in in Christianity, traditionally throughout, from late antiquity, through the Middle Ages, Christians understood four sources of authority or why we do what we do, how we know that we're justified in, in believing certain things and acting in certain ways, as Christians. And so the those sources were, on the one hand scripture. And the second hand is the testimony of the earliest Christians, so sometimes called the Christian fathers, because it's mostly men, unfortunately, but anyway, that that's one of the early

Christians. And so what those folks wrote about. Three is tradition, and for his apostolic succession, and so the idea that the ancient and Medieval Christians had, that there had been Jesus Christ as a historical figure that he had in history, ordained certain apostles. The apostles had in turn ordained bishops who had ordained other bishops and so on in an unbroken succession all the way to the present. And that's still the position of anybody, generally speaking, who has a church that has bishops, who can trace their bishops all the way back. The main problem with it in terms of a historical argument is nobody can trace their bishops back, you know, before really the the second century. And they end the next portion of it, this idea that there had been this, that Jesus had set up a church on the one hand, and that there had been apostles who were, you know, set up and they set up bishops doesn't seem to have been doesn't you can't make you can't prove that historically, in any event, and there's reason to imagine that that's not really how, for example, the church in Rome was being operating until later so that they this, the bishops asserted authority, and by the time the historical record starts getting going, but it's a problematic claim. So anyway, so that's one issue. And so then, what has happened in the beginning of the modern era. The people in northern and western Europe, were wanted to reform certain things with the Western church, so the Latin church. And so among those things, was the movement, for example, called Conciliarism, which instead of having the church be led by a single Bishop, the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, as we call them, they were suggesting that actually an Ecumenical Council, a Universal Council of the bishops is actually a higher authority than any one one bishop. And so that would have been one idea. So in other words, is an authority question. And they also began to dispute so that's a, a argument against apostolic succession as the as instead So instead, it's a kind of a pro democratic one where In other words, we are all the representatives of all of the Christians and specifically would have been the bishops at first But ultimately it becomes kind of what we do with the World Conference and community price, which is to say, every member of the church in a congregation, elects delegates to the Mission Center Conference and their mission Center and the mission center conferences, elected delegates to the World Conference, and that becomes the highest body, the legislative and every actually everybody in terms of the church. And so that actually can canonize and de canonize, in other words, so the World Conference expresses that. So that's kind of a, that our understanding of that is actually kind of born out of these reforms. The reforms ultimately become Protestantism and ultimately breaks the western church into pieces instead of reforming. And so after that the Protestants argue anyway, that they have a doctrine that they introduced, which is called sola scriptura, which means scripture is the sole source of authority. So where is your authority from if you are a Lutheran Bible. Right? And so in that the answer to the question that your Mormon friend asked you, you know, you know it for where does the Lutheran minister get their authority? It's ultimately derived from the Bible. Because anyway, the Bible is the sole source of authority. So in the in the restoration tradition, which is born out of Protestantism, Mormons often think of themselves as being quite different from Protestants. But in fact, the entire foundation is Protestant. So the restoration tradition is born out of Protestantism and, and but it changes essentially the understanding of authority a little bit because the goal initially is to restore the church to be what was then called the primitive church, what we might call the apostolic church. So this church that people can read about in Scripture at the time of Acts, and also in the time of Paul's writing his letters.

But it's also unfortunately, as I've already mentioned, when I was talking about Catholic claims, it's also a time that isn't Really a very historical. So in other words, although the people in the time of the restoration very earnestly believe that that was a historical period, and they wanted to restore everything to be like that, in fact, it doesn't doesn't actually exist as a historical period. But in any event, that's kind of the goal. And so we want to restore and so there is an idea then that was floating around that's not original to Mormonism, but is part of even Protestantism and specifically primitivism. So the other reform and restoration movements, there's an idea that during late antiquity, and through till, modern times, that there had been a Great Apostasy and so that the church in the Middle Ages wasn't, you know, wasn't valid. So it's writing off the entire inheritance when you also are getting rid of the Pope. So it's a it's a further level of denying, you know, you're we're denying now that we're not going to be rid of the Catholic Church, but we're not going to call the whole medieval church, the Catholic Church, you know, and we're going to try to instead trace our roots back to the earliest component of the church and say, essentially that we are identical to that. And so that is that essentially is the goal of this, and so and so in so doing the Restoration, created ideas or arguments that were actually evolving themselves. But the goal of it was to say we have the, we are the, we're the latter day saints, you know, which is to say, because this is the latter days now, and the saints as it was the name for Christians in the New Testament times. And so those are the primitive saints and were the latter day saints and so now we're but there's a continuity, essentially an imagined continuity between those two and everything in the middle, the intervening 1800 years of history or whatever it is. 100 years is all being thrown away with the bathwater.

Carla Long 11:54

You know a lot of stuff. Oh my God, I know this off the top of your head. This is amazing. Second of all, I wanted to make a comment about the restoration of the what Tony Chvala-Smith called there's he said, there's no original recipe for the church. And sometimes I hear people talking about, oh, you know, the church that Jesus built? Like, ehhhh Jesus didn't really build a church.

John Hamer 12:19

Right.

Carla Long 12:20

So anyway, I appreciate all of that. So that's excellent history of why we need to talk about priesthood authority and where it comes from.

John Hamer 12:28

Yeah.

Carla Long 12:29

So we have a lot of seekers that listen to this podcast and a lot of community Christ people and I don't know where the two meet. So if we could talk,

John Hamer 12:38

Yeah, that's where we kind of led to in this historical thing, I was gonna tend to give a little context for the Protestant and Catholic and everything background, but now we get to get to how did how did ideas of authority emerge in the restoration, and those evolved rapidly too, so it's not there's not just one way that the that authority was, is understood and it's, let's say the way that's The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints understands it. Now they understand it in quite a different way than the earliest beginnings of the members understood. And so initially, for example, you can kind of track even the earliest ideas by reading the Book of Mormon. And by reading what the Book of Mormon in order of author how it was written, so it was written starting from the book of Mosiah, and to the end. And then the beginning part, it is the last part written. And so actually, what happens kind of early on, in in the composition of the text is that they are trying, there's a need that's felt by the characters in the book of mormon by a guy named Alma, the elder who has led his people out into the wilderness. They they have a desire to have a church. And so and so this is actually very different from what had come before. So before we've had no no real church, there's a King Benjamin who was giving a speech, that's the earliest part. And he doesn't, he doesn't one time tell of a need for baptism or anything like that, that hasn't they don't have that understanding yet, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and the people around him, but then by the time they get to Alma, they'd have a desire and a need for understanding baptism. And so and so how do they even if they don't know how to make it happen, because where's the authority come from? And so Alma goes up into the lake, and he prays and the the Spirit descends on him, and he essentially self baptizes himself. And then he starts baptizing everybody else. And so the initial idea of authority is like that. And that's essentially how it starts in, at and simultaneously in the restoration tradition. So although the story is later changed, and reimagined and understood that there's potentially a visitation of John the baptist or something like that, the, the original way that this would have been understood is just like an Alma story. So the Spirit descends on Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, who baptized each other, and that's where baptism kind of starts. Now, the ideas evolve later about what the church, you know, you know, the church's authority and need and keys and priesthood and all these kind of things, but they don't have all of that yet. You know, they have first office, just the spirits and baptism, and it's described, very kind of, clearly an ailment. But then things do evolve, you know, and so, so to get to the place where, frankly, the RLDS church was in the middle of the 20th century, and and also it would be understandable to where it's not the same but it would be understandable to people in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is this idea that that priesthood, legitimate priesthood was taken off the earth during the Great Apostasy and then it is restored. At the same kind of time period of the early church down in Harmony, Pennsylvania, and so and so then the understanding of how this works then is that various priesthood keys, whatever that's meant to mean are re are brought back to the earth by visit angelic visitations potentially a Peter, James and John and so on and so forth that restore both Uronic and Melchizedek priesthood. The problem with this later story is that it's anachronistic it didn't occur at the time it was, we can tell that these ideas of Melchizedek priesthood didn't exist at that time in the in the church, but it's later understood to have happened at that time. And that's how it's understood now. But the idea then is that there was a whole time period where and so so, so I'll just say that that's kind of weird that you

kind of get to this. It's the idea of that kind of authority then, is one of that is history based. And it's also very literalistic. And it's very exclusive. And so the exclusive source of authority for on the whole universe, frankly, you know, is is arriving for tiny groups of people first in, in Judea Palestine, in in Roman times, and then is taken from the earth and is restored again to a tiny group of people in, in Pennsylvania. And that everybody else, you know, you know, doesn't have, you know, throughout all of history and all time and everything like that doesn't have legitimate authority or legitimate connection in that sense. And so, that was our position, I would say also in the LDS church, which is that our church, as I'd like to say, 1950 was the one and only true church on the face of the earth, the only one that had the property. Full proper structure, all of the offices that you needed all of everything else in order to be the true Church of Jesus Christ on the earth. And so that would have been, how the authority was understood. And I think that's still kind of how it's understood in the LDS context. And I mean, the main issue again is the same problem that I argue with about apostolic succession for the Catholics. The stories of the both, let's say getting the keys are anachronistic. Both the the Melchizedek priesthood establishment story is an anachronism that didn't happen at the time. And this it's a story that's created later. And the story for example, that that also the LDS Church looks to about that's actually establishes plural marriage, but now what they call just celestial marriage ceiling, the ceiling power and that's a story that is an again anachronistically put back to the Kirtland temple time period where there's a visitation of Christ in the Kirtland temple. The problem with that, again, is that those ideas of plural marriage and and everything like that didn't exist at the time. So it's a it's a retrospective thing. And then finally, the the the core problem with the argument that your authority comes from that is that then Joseph Smith's killed and so how do the keys continue? And so there's a principle that in this view, this exclusionary view Why didn't have an apostasy again, just like, just like in an Peter and Paul's time? And the answer, actually is it would have and the reason why is that, by this idea of authority, the lesser cannot ordain the greater if you run out of elders in your congregation, you cannot get the deacon to make a new elder. Likewise, when you run out of prophets, you cannot have apostles ordain you a prophet. That's not because that's because the lessor can't ordain the grater. And so there is an idea that retrospectively gets injected into the narrative from the LDS side that, that Joseph Smith distributed the keys to the 12 prior to his death, and that's again anachronistic, they're referring actually to ceremonies that he did when he was creating a council of 50 which is unrelated to church keys it's he's this reestablishing something called the kingdom It has nothing to do with the church and church succession or priesthood, which is restored completely priesthood is restored before the church is restored. So it is not really related. So anyway, that's not the case. And then to the the polygamy revelation itself, that is in the Utah LDS D&C says, No, the keys can only be held by one man time on Earth, so you can't distribute them to 12 people no matter what. Anyway, so it's not a there's no way you can make the canonical argument for it, if you Have that position in my in my view, that's my, my position. So, anyway, so we abandoned it, I would say as well in terms of like, Okay, so how do we how did we make that argument though beforehand? And so the idea of it is that there's a couple different ways. And so the idea of it is in the Doctrine and Covenants, it says, If Joseph Smith, if Joseph Smith falls here, he shall have no power save up to appoint another and instead, so there's the scriptural basis, several times in his life, he appointed his son as the successor. And then in terms of the if you're going to use this kind of key based arguments

about ordination, William Marks is the person who ordains Joseph, the third president of the church. William Mark says as president of the presiding High Council was equal in authority to Brigham Young. And so you would neither one of them in my view in terms of the argument, you can't have the lesser ordain, the greater anyway. But in any event, they're the same. And so therefore the same level of kind of keys would, you know, exist, going through those two lines. But it like Joseph Smith, the third always said, his authority isn't coming from some kind of earthly thing where you have a human, humans that are given some kind of authority over all other humans, but rather, his authority is from God. And indeed, I would say, our understanding of this now and Community of Christ is, which is not that we have exclusive authority, but rather that we have our own special calling and other people all are called and then there is that there is that the Holy Spirit is working, not just, presumably not just on Earth, the universe is huge, you know, and so it's not just one little group of people, you know, I mean, it's not just Christians, anyway, so that they're the Holy Spirit is working in all kinds of different ways and we don't limit God. But that doesn't mean we don't have a special calling, but our understanding of authority Now is that Christ didn't come to be the kind of on earth celestial dictator of an authoritarian regime that maybe many people thought he would at the time. So in other words, they assumed the Messiah was going to come and create a political kingdom that would impose all of God's will on the planet. And instead, Christ comes in this very unexpected way, as we read about in the New Testament, where essentially, we're talking about a person who is who is watching the disciples feet doing this acts of showing the person who's highest authority is a servant. And so we understand authority then as as servanthood ministry. And so it's the authority to serve God's people everywhere, as opposed to, to rule them. And so and so it is a different, it's a different view of that. And that's a different view. We have, I think now than we had 70 years ago.

Carla Long 12:38  
Oh, that's a lot, John.

John Hamer 24:02  
I'm sorry, they didn't breathe. So you could, can you jump in. I'm sorry!

Carla Long 24:06  
No, you did. Great. Okay. So, I mean that this is this is a lot. So let me just ask a few little specific questions that people might be wondering. So I have heard in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints if they have once they are ordained once a boy is ordained at the age of 12, or 11. They have a list that takes them back. They have a list of people that takes them back to Jesus.

John Hamer 24:38  
Yeah.

Carla Long 24:38  
Right?

John Hamer 24:39

Or it could be Yeah, sure. In the same way that you can do genealogy back to Adam, if you want. Anyway, that's not it's not quite the same because there's this there's an actual anyway, depends on how you look at this thing. So it goes to a certain point and then it'll get to Peter, James and John and then Jesus right. So another, so it'll it. It goes to it's not a, the only reason why that's the same as doing your genealogy back to Adam is it doesn't that last part is relying on on a, something that's not historical, but it's it's something that is about belief.

Carla Long 25:12

I will admit every time you say Peter, James and John, I think Peter, Paul and Mary and I, I don't know why. So but Community of Christ, RLDS used to do that as well. And that and we stopped doing that when we in the 50s, like you said, when we kind of are 60, 70s, when we started moving away from the idea that we're the one true church, correct?

John Hamer 25:31

Yeah. Well, so. So, you know, okay, so there's a, I think there's something interesting about that, that that document, and so I think that if you if we're doing it, I think that it would be so I think it's a sad that in Community of Christ, we don't tell we aren't as aware of our forbearers. We I spent a bunch of time talking about all the pastors that went before me in this long line that goes back to 1836, you know, in Toronto, and that I want to be very aware of, you know, all of the faithful stewards that sacrificed to bring us to where we are, as we have a Community of Christ here in the 21st century. And I think, unfortunately, our kind of extreme, you know, just not worrying about history and thinking about other things that has happened in the last 70 years in Community of Christ, as meant that we forget that the members of the reorganization have, in many cases, much deeper roots in the restoration than members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, in part because they are so much better at converting people, you know, and so as a result of not being very good at it, the people in Community of Christ often have roots that go all the way back to the Kirtland era. And a lot of people just don't know it, you know, and so, I mean, the people who go around and meet you realize, you know, they're these are, I know people in Community of Christ are descendants of Alpheus Cutler, we were descendants of James Strang, you know, who are descendants, you know, of Charles B. Tompson, so all of the different interesting characters because they're all, you know, the Wights, you know of Lyman Wight, you know, there, it's we know everybody who's these descendants, but we don't really don't hardly talk about it. And so I do think that, that there would be a value to having the document like that in order to just be thoughtful and mindful of the fact that you have a continuity of stewardship and that we're remembering that the problem though is, is that when we, you know, we, we, the reason why we got rid of things like that, I think is that you then if you think of it as magic, and you think that that that there's power in that humans have and that they have like a exclusive title to or something like that. It's it's theologically a very problematic position for all kinds of different reasons. And so like already, let's say in in antiquity, you Christianity, there was a there was an argument in the third, third century in Africa, third and fourth century in Africa. So Africa, Northern Africa, Tunisia, used to be a major Christian Heartland. And so what happened was as a persecution, all kinds of the bishops, like pretended that they weren't Christian anymore, you know, and just so

that they wouldn't get killed by the Romans and thrown to the lions and this kind of thing. And when they and when they came back when the when the persecution was over, the people that had gotten thrown to the lions were didn't like all the people who, you know, who had said okay, no, I'm not Christian after all, you know, but now they are again, and so they and so they had there ended up being this dispute where they're saying, okay, all of you guys aren't true Christians, because you because you disavowed when the time came. And so, therefore, all of the sacraments you perform are not valid.

And so, but the problem with that Position becomes, it becomes logistically a nightmare if you actually start to take it. So every one of those bishops, every one of their ordinations doesn't count every one of the priests that they've ordained, every baptism doesn't count. So all the people now all the way throughout all the people, they've married, they're not married. In other words, all of those kind of things. And so if we were to do this thing, where we're were sacraments relied on human agency, for them to be valid, you don't know in that chart, you don't know in that priesthood chart, which one of those people was in just grave apostasy or whatever, by your own understanding of that, in other words, that they were having an affair right, then if that's what you would have think in that in your worldview, that that would make it in the person out of, you know, shouldn't be they shouldn't be taking the sacrament in the Mormon sense of it, right. So then your preacher lens doesn't work. And you and so in the same way that when you do the genealogy back to Adam, there's a very high chance, you know, in the course of once you're doing 40 generations, that that there's not a Genetic relationship that at some point, in other words, because somebody is believed to be the child, they're of those two parents, but in fact, and they were raised as them and everything like that, and yet, and yet, there's infidelity. And so there and so it's quite possible that when you do a generationally like that, that it's not gonna be the case. And so that's, it's a it's a, you can't do it literalistic Lee, so, so little realistically, it wouldn't make any any sense. And so if we put my opinion in and so that's why that was already in the third century, declared a heresy. So in other words, it doesn't matter how bad your priest is, the sacrament still counts because it's from God. And so that's, and that's what the church decided, like I say, it's Mormons don't necessarily care because it's during the Great Apostasy. But anyway, so that's what that's what Christians decided for thousands of years. And I think that that's kind of where we also are at which is, you know, the authority here is is coming as a direct covenant relationship that the individual has with God, you know, and so that's, well anyway.

Carla Long 31:08

Oh man like, I've never even thought about that, what a mess, that would be a huge mess. And like, if you, if you if we use the list, then it kind of takes away a little bit of that. I mean, it kind of would take us back to that one true church idea for me, you know, because like, if we have a list, if someone asked you the question, Where is your priesthood authority come from? You might go to the list rather than say, it comes from God.

John Hamer 31:37

Right. And it like leads to list shopping. So like a person could have, you know, I mean, maybe people do this, you know, the unit way will be that you like Parley P. Pratt. And so you know,

you want to get somebody who's list takes you through people so that you can have higher status priesthood or something like that, because you've gone, you know, because and then when I always never get about the list thing is so yeah this boys are getting their their first list when they're 11 but is that the one that that's not the one they're using later because they're later ordained to be an elder and so now they would have a whole new list or whatever and they're also later ordained to be high priest or something. So is that is that always being overwritten? I'm not sure how, how people are looking at it. I guess I understand it to be that every time you get a new new ordination, you just get a whole new list or whatever, but

Carla Long 32:30

Well, you know more about it than I only knew there is a list I didn't really know. Yeah, when I'm talking to people about ordination and Community of Christ, especially when seekers when xLDS become Community of Christ. You know, we talk about priesthood, and they're like it. I mean, they they automatically think that you're higher, automatically, right? Because you have a title. Yeah. I say no, no, no, no, no, it's actually lowering of yourself. It's a service and that is so mind blowing to so many seekers that I talked to because we don't raise ourselves up. I'm like priesthood is actually kind of a pain and it's hard. Yeah. It's not something to aspire to necessarily because you have to work hard. Do you want to talk a little bit more about the, the hierarchy?

John Hamer 33:17

Also, I want to say that we are only, that's aspirational for us. We're only getting there, you know, so I'm very much have gone to I've gone into Community, old Community of Christ chapels, where they still have like three thrones that are up at the front, you know, and you're like, that's kind of that doesn't really model what we're trying to do with, you know, it's kind of a traditional RLDS configuration where there's essentially three thrones that are at the front with two pulpits, you know, and so and like, and it's a like a raised diest. And, you know, the reality of it is, you know, I had just okay, so there's a bourbon congregation here. That's one of our daughter congregations in Scarborough and they built the building four years ago, and they have a there was a raised deist, and, you know, if you weren't in priests if you weren't allowed on that thing. And so, you know, like, we had like this I had a woman who was talking about, you know, like just you know, like how she was in you know, doing I don't know, like ministry, you know, and but in the 70s but you know, she'd stepped up on the on this thing and then she got like, booed or not, you know, anyway push, you know, like, told not to do that, you know, by the priesthood authorities, which were all male back then. You know, and so and so I think that we, you know, it's not been forever that long ago that you know, I I've been to the churches today you know, where the where the thrones are still kind of there. And what I mean by that is a big fancy chair that sort of like in the LDS people will know from general conference where there's they've got all 15 of the fancy chairs that are up in front, we would have had three for the presiding elder of the congregation and the two counselors often end up So I've seen those within the last few years even though just because because once you have a nice chair, it's hard to pick it down, or whatever. But anyway, that's kind of but it's not modeling what we want to be modeling in terms of servanthood ministry. And so what I would say is that my experience in my congregation and and certainly, how I've seen you model priesthood in

Salt Lake, is what we're talking about, but it but we're still it's aspirational, in that we are trying to achieve that it's still been a little bit complicated to to go from a priesthood that was viewed hierarchically and was viewed as sort of a way as it was, in a sense gradations you know, and so we have done a thing where we've taken, you know, going all the way from Deacon to Prophet and we've taken it and put it at this site, you know, this way and so we have a chart now that it's just all side by side and it shows disciple, which is to say people who are members who are not in priesthood and all of their responsibilities all the way to President of the church Prophet President. But nevertheless, we still have some rules around priesthood and around sacraments that are a little bit exclusionary. And so we we haven't totally come to terms with it all ourselves, but we're in, we're moving forward is what I'd say.

Carla Long 36:18

Well, we're certainly trying. And like we're trying so hard not to be hierarchical, but it's really hard. When you say that a deacon cannot ordain an elder, right. Like that. Is that implies some sort of hierarchy, even though gosh, we try so hard not to make that happen.

John Hamer 36:36

Yeah. I mean, there's all these rules, and I was actually so i when i was ordained as a 70, a couple years ago here, and there's, the rules aren't always clear what they are. And I was like, trying to figure out okay, well, so can a high priest help out in ordaining 70 or who's allowed to put their hands you know, what I mean? It's like, what's the rules here? You know, cuz there, we still have these rules, you know, and so exactly what how that works, you know? isn't always clear, because in some cases, you know, there's some, it's spelled out for how you how you do it with an elder, but we don't really know first, maybe Seventies, at least it's not written down anywhere, I could find it very easily. So, anyway, so it's so it's still an ongoing, you know, thing and we also, part of it is intentionally we view priesthood and also, maybe more especially sacraments, you know, with very intentional reverence, you know, we don't, it's not I think we try not to view this as, as literalistic or as having some kind of a anyway, like, it's like an energy of their own that's not of God. But anyway, you know, that anything like that, but in spite, it's something that nevertheless had spires deep meaning. And so we also know that if we make if we do things without that kind of mindfulness and that thoughtfulness If we do things that are extraordinarily different or things like that, it can be meaningful to some people, but it can be very dissonant to other people. And so we have approached those things very cautiously.

Carla Long 38:15

Yeah, I, you know, I've heard people talk about even over the last 10-20 years, like, what if we just dissolve the priesthood, dissolve priesthood completely in Community of Christ? And maybe just because it's been a product of my life, I can't even wrap my head around what that means simply because of the sacraments actually. Because when I know when I'm performing a sacrament, I am prayerful beforehand, I tried to make prepare myself and be ready. And because I feel that real weight of responsibility on me, and I just don't understand how that could look. Also, you know, in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when, you know, there's the big ordain women movement. I don't wrap my head around what it would look like for women to be ordained in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the structure

they have now, young boys ordained at 11 or 12. Would girls be like everybody would they should be? Yeah, yeah, absolutely should be. But would everybody be ordained then, like, I can't even wrap my head around what that would look like.

John Hamer 39:17

I mean, it's already it's already unusual, right? So the early church structure was not that every all men and boys were ordained. You know, it's so that's one thing that we have maintained that they haven't, which is to say, this universal ordination of half of the population, and specifically not to the other half is, is unusual. And so and that's not what was going on in the early church or the early church. My great great great grandfather joined and you know, was made a teacher, you know, and and so it's not it was not a calling for 14 year olds, it was for he was 38 or something like that at the time, you know what I mean? And so and not and a lot of other people were not ordained you know, I mean, so that's not it's not that everybody instantly became an elder or high priest who was a male and women nothing. And certainly, anyway, so certainly deacons were, were not 11 year old boys, they were kind of these rough, you know, kind of wild west kind of guys, the guys who were not going to speak and be on the pulpit, but who may be wearing, you know, gonna make sure the meetings we're gonna move the chairs around on the one hand, but on the other hand, making sure that nobody's disrupting the meeting, you know, kind of thing. And so these are anyway, so those were more what the deacons would have been like back then as opposed to you know, so it's, it's a little bit strange, but the part of the thing is that it's they have a strange system already, where almost half of the people are ordained and so we just have to either not have everybody be ordained or have everybody be ordained.

Carla Long 40:48

Well, I mean, well, just when I think about the ordain women movement, it's a much bigger issue than I mean, the more you think about it, the bigger it becomes for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. And I don't mean to harp on it, I just yeah, you know, I like sit in the I sit in Salt Lake right in the heart of where this is happening. And people talk about it so often and I'm just like it would be an entire overhaul of the entire structure. It's a pretty big deal.

John Hamer 41:18

Yeah, and and we, you know, when you're talking about whether we could operate without priesthood, that would also be you know, just like you say, it's such a completely crazy, I mean, it's such a different overhaul from how the whole church has been structured, and throughout all of our history, and how our understanding of everything that said we could potentially be open to different ways that we understand it, and we maybe should be open to more different ways. And I actually don't know, this is just the I think we should be open to dialogue. And this i'm not saying what we should do or what we shouldn't do. I just say ideas that we could be open to I think are are things like, even though there are traditional things that we understand deacons or priests or elders to be able to do and other people, other deacons to not be able to do that we may be nevertheless should just should just should eliminate exclusionary requirements. And and say instead, as a deacon, you may well find meaning in doing some of the traditional things, and you may well find meaning in, in your calling, doing some other

things. But we aren't saying that, that it's a limited calling in any way, you know, and that kind of thing. I don't know. So we may want to rethink some of our exclusionary rules. And but on the other hand, I think the way that it should always work is that rather than saying, there's a place by which, which you know, this isn't, you know, the hard literalistic No, but rather instead there's lots of possibilities, but we maybe want to uphold, you know, a certain you know, this one as being The main thing you might be doing, you know, or something like that, you know, but not telling you you can't do something else, you know. So

Carla Long 43:07

This is a very interesting conversation. I haven't thought about this for a really long time thought about, although as a pastor, and you know this, it's a really big responsibility calling someone to priesthood. Yeah. It's a scary responsibility calling someone to priesthood and I'm glad I don't have to do it completely alone. I have a pastorate leadership team that I can talk to about it, but it's really big and weighty responsibility. Have you found that for you?

John Hamer 43:36

Yeah, yeah. Because, yeah, I mean, I can't give any details of anywhere, but like, I found it to be life changing for people involved, right. And because of that, you know, when, through discernment of the Holy Spirit, when you are able to recognize something in somebody that they maybe don't even see in themselves in that maybe because they haven't been given that affirmation, you know, that they haven't looked within themselves for that sense of calling to that thing, even though you can totally see that would be there, you know, and so that that can be just really, really amazing. But the other part of it is that you know, that you can, there are there are times when you feel that you're seeing that so much. This is not something I'm talking about priesthood calling, but now I'm thinking about a administration, when, where it was a blessing of comfort that I really, I really felt like I could see what the person's need was, and I thought, like, I was really expressing that and then I felt like the person really didn't listen to that. Anyway, you know, so it just, but that's just on my end. And so I can't only worry about it from what my perspective of it is because what the like I said at the beginning of this thing, when I was talking about the, the whether or not the sacrament is valid when somebody who is not is completely unworthy is doing it. It's not me that's doing it. And so it's not what's important is even administration or an ordination, the, the, the sacrament is occurring between the person and God and as they are covenanting. And so what is the Holy Spirit's thing to them and speaking to them, I can, it can be wonderful for me to be able to participate and to bring, you know, my insights or whatever I might have to them, but anyway, at the end of the day, it's between them and God.

Carla Long 45:28

Well, yeah, to come full story full full circle back to my first story, right when she said, Where do you get your priesthood authority, and I rather flippantly it really was flippantly said, from God. I'm so glad that I wasn't completely off base and community. That's what I've always been taught. But, yeah, when you look back at what you've been taught, sometimes it's not exactly where we are now. So I'm glad that you're good to go. Yeah. So John, I really appreciated this

conversation. Is there something else that we think we should talk about that we haven't talked about yet?

John Hamer 46:04

Not necessarily. I think that I think that we, I mean, just part of it is been, you know, just what just gonna want to bring up the fact that where we're at is a place that it's not that we have a that we've got this all figured out and we know exactly what we're doing. And so we shouldn't be coming as community price from place that well, we're always right. And we know what's going on. In fact, actually, I was like even trying to, like, find I was reading some of our, I don't know, these are backwards anyways, anyway, some of our more recent books on authority in the RLDS traditional theological tradition, and the theology colloquy thing, authority, membership and baptism. And so anyways, just going to look at even what our kind of current resources are on to this question and, and I would actually say that our that it's as close as these are, we're pretty good at knowing what our idea used to be and why we don't think that but if we aren't as good at explaining where we got that idea now and how do we justify it? And how do we understand it in a in a, in a systematic sense or in a, in a theologically sound sense. And there's even a very good caution and one of the in this book anyway, that in some cases, Community of Christ by not by not having laid out our theological foundation as well as maybe we should, when we are attracted to an idea that seems good and right, we may be adopted without actually realizing, but we're deconstructing and, and to what are the underlying premises of all of the different theological background that you know that this thing we're adopting? And so that's why anyway, as I'm trying to ever wrestle with these questions, I do try to put it into as broad a historical context as possible to do kind of the research and understand how Christians have throughout time in primitive church antiquity, Middle Ages, Protestantism and everything like that, the restoration how do we kind of wrestle with these questions, but not ever saying that we, you know, have the definitive answer, but we are always open to, you know, new light in truth. You know,

Carla Long 48:10

I think that is very well put. And I think that you understand community, Christ so well and so many ways. When you say that, you know, like we understand where we came from, and somewhat in a lot of ways we understand because where we came from seems to have very definite answers. Yeah. It's like, Oh, yes, this is true. And this is true and this is true.

John Hamer 48:33

And that is not true.

Carla Long 48:35

That is not it. Now we are now truth become truth, whatever that means, because a little bit hazier. And we don't have definitive answers, our answers are, you know, we believe that God is calling us to do this, but if we're wrong, we're going to try and fix it, we believe, right? And so it's just, it's just not as concrete as it used to be. And so I do think a lot of our people are a little scared to say that this is the answer. And I kind of understand that I work in Community of

Christ. I've worked with him for 15 years. And I still sometimes worried about what I'm, what the church is saying and what you know, I even I kind of get a little worried.

John Hamer 49:18

Yeah, well, I'll just say, so like, last month, I went to the meeting of the Canadian Council of Churches, which is our ecumenical body in Canada, as a visiting member is one of the two delegates representing Community of Christ in Canada. And they were, you know, they're considering our we're affiliate, but we're, they're considering us as a full member. And so one of the things they're very worried about is because of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints rejects trinitarianism they reject a lot of, you know, that's a very different Christology and theology than then all the rest of Christianity and so, and so they're very worried about that with us. And so nevertheless, if you get to us talking to, let's say, like one of the leading Greek Orthodox theologians of the era right now, you know, who is the representative of the ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople for Canada, and he is quizzing you on on Chalcedonian Christology. You know, and how good good is our our, it's pretty easy to it's pretty easy to walk into heresy when you ever try to talk about the Trinity for more than a minute.

So anyway, I totally understand where you're coming from about, you know, about, you know, just like, ooh, I think we say this.

Carla Long 50:47

Wow, well, John, what you're describing happens to me basically every day so you know, like, that's no problem. I always have to talk to the foremost authority in the Greek Church. Blah, blah, blah. Oh my gosh, job. That sounds terrifying. Thank God it was fun!

John Hamer 51:02

He was great. I made it I made a joke with him. So

Carla Long 51:08

That's always good. That's that's my go to if things get uncomfortable as well, I get it. Yeah. Well, John, thank you so much for being on the podcast. Thank you for sharing your knowledge with us. This has been so enlightening for me. And when I get asked that question again, I'm just gonna be like, we have this great podcast for you to listen to, which is one of my favorite things to do.

John Hamer 51:28

Very good. Thank you so much.

Josh Mangelson 51:39

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