

## 359 | Coffee Buzz | 20 Years: Called By a New Name Project Zion Podcast

### **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.

### **Linda Booth** 00:33

Welcome to the 18th episode of Coffee Buzz, a podcast conversation with a member of Community of Christ First Presidency. My name is Linda booth. I'm a longtime member of Community of Christ and retired Apostle and Director of Communications. In this episode, I'll be having a conversation with Prophet President Steve Veazey, about the church's name, Community of Christ. Why that topic you may ask? Because April 6, is the 20th anniversary of the church's name change from Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, to Community of Christ. Welcome, friend. I have forgotten how long it takes to say the church's old name. Maybe that's why so many, when asked what church they belong to, would say, "RLDS." And when you think about that acronym, those letters didn't tell anything about us. And they certainly didn't include the words Jesus Christ, which is the center of our faith movement. I know for a long time, some leaders prayed about, thought about, and discussed a new name for the church that would be faithful to our heritage, and even true to our identity and calling. And I think it was in the early 1990s, that leaders gathered at Estes Park, Colorado, within the United States. And there they were inspired with a new name Community of Christ, which wasn't shared with the church at that time. But also birthed at that gathering was a mission statement for the church. And our mission statement is "We proclaim Jesus Christ, and promote communities of joy, hope, love and peace." That mission statement was shared and welcomed and widely used by congregations around the world. So Steve, you were called and ordained to serve as an apostle in the Council of Twelve in 1992. Were you in attendance at that Estes Park gathering? And if so, what was your experience?

### **Steve Veazey** 02:41

Yes, I was in attendance at that retreat, at the YMCA of the Rockies, at Estes Park. And I have a lot of memories about that experience. I was fairly new, of course, in the Council of 12. So I was still learning how to function in the council and when we had joint councils. One of my fond memories is one day we had a snowball fight after a fresh snow, or some of us did, not everyone. And during the times we were in session, we had a lot of in depth discussion about the very nature and future of the church. And the church previously had a vision and mission statement that was pretty substantial in its length, and the number of words, which really made it more difficult to translate and communicate around the world. So a lot of our effort went into developing key concepts to describe the essence of the church and then a more succinct mission statement. And I think a few folks even began writing some new hymns for the church in the midst of that experience. But we were looking for a statement that could be more easily understood and translated throughout the whole world. The church is established in over 50 something nations and functions in multiple languages. So we were trying to get to key concepts that were faithful, but also future oriented. And the new mission statement emerged during that time as well as some other concepts that continued to impact the church. And the mission statement really resonated with the group and I'm not just talking intellectually, there was a spiritual resonance and peacefulness when

we reached that point of a statement. And I think, if I remember correctly, at the same time, we were talking about other issues, but it was really, the congealing around the mission statement that provided a foundation or a stimulus for talking about a name that would better reflect our identity, then and then going forward. And so we had discussion, various people made inputs in terms of ideas about a new name. But I remember when—and I'm not sure who first expressed it—it seemed like it was more of a joint effort, but I'm sure someone had to say it. The name Community of Christ. And this is a little bit of history that I especially recall, I was sitting not too far away from the First Presidency. And I remember hearing President Wallace (B.) Smith, who was president at the time saying, "That's it. That's it." And although we knew it would take the church some time to understand and consider and hopefully embrace it. I think there was a strong sense in that moment that that would be the church's public name in the not too distant future.

**Linda Booth 06:41**

Ohh, that's a wonderful memory. I became aware of the new name when I was ordained in 1998, to serve as an apostle. And I remember the first time I heard it spoken by a colleague in the Council of Twelve. I immediately loved the name and thought it was inspired. I kept thinking, Oh, this is a gift from God. The new name Community of Christ, I thought described us: we're centered in Jesus Christ, and we're all about building community and zionic living. And it was a "that's it" moment for me too. In preparation for the 2000 World Conference, the discussion around church leadership tables got serious about presenting the new name to the church. And as world church leaders, we were asked by then President Grant MacMurray, to consider bringing the new name Community of Christ, to the international delegates who would attend the World Conference that year. Those leadership discussions were lively, I remember, and at times passionate. There were a few leaders who oppose the name, or didn't believe it was the right time to discuss the change at World Conference. Steve, What do you remember about those leadership discussions? And what did you think about the new name?

**Steve Veazey 08:02**

I remember the discussions. You know, pretty well, as you describe it. That's what happened. We continued to have discussion, as we weighed the positive impact of the new name with the ability of the church to embrace it worldwide. And I think those who were more hesitant. We're trying to be sensitive, especially to those members, who had experienced a whole lot of change. In the past couple of decades, the church had really evolved in terms of its understanding of ministry, ordained ministry, giftedness, trying to become more inclusive and some experienced that as difficult change, certainly not everybody, but but some did. There were also some issues involved around legal aspects of what do we need to retain for legal purposes, as we would move to a new kind of public identity. So there was a lot of questions about that. A lot of official documents exist in the name of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, for example. And there were a few translations questions where Community of Christ, without the word church attached, or the translation of community didn't get to where the meaning of the name was meant to be. So there were translations issues that were brought up. I do recall discussions where some of the more senior leaders though, shared testimonies of support. And I think that was very significant in that process, their affirmative testimony. And as a result of that a spirit of consensus and rightness, settled into the group. I have a distinct memory at some point of President Sheehey, who was a counselor, at the time, I believe saying, "I guess in some ways, I

will always belong to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, but I want my grandchildren to belong to Community of Christ." And I remember kind of the electricity in the air when that happened, and it was a good experience. So overall a spirit of consensus settled into the group. I think we all had a sense of kind of a sentimental loss, because we had invested ourselves in the older name. But I knew it was right. And I was ready to embrace it. And I did enthusiastically and fully,

**Linda Booth** 11:30

Yes, yes. You were, I think, Council of Twelve Secretary at the time. And I believe that the First Presidency brought the resolution for the new name to the 2000 World Conference, is that correct?

**Steve Veazey** 11:44

Yes. When it came down to official action, at the World Conference, the First Presidency sponsored the legislation, or it came from the First Presidency. And then, since the presidency was presiding over the conference, there needed to be a mover of the resolution. And so President of Council of Twelve Alex Katava was actually the mover of the resolution. Now, it was interesting as as part of considering the legislation, the First Presidency indicated that this was a very important issue, and that it would require at least a two-thirds vote in support of the change, which meant that the presidency was really wanting strong support in order to move into the future.

**Linda Booth** 12:45

Yes, I remember the apostles talked about their role during the discussion of the resolution at World Conference. And the council decided that only one or two apostles should speak in favor to allow the body plenty of opportunity to share their perspectives. And there were several colleagues who volunteered to speak because there was a full support in the Council of Twelve for the name change. And because I was new, it was kind of a surprise to me when Apostle David Brock asked me to speak to the resolution at World Conference, and he had two reasons. One was that I was one of two women on the council. And secondly, he wanted me to share a specific comment I had made during one of our discussions. And so I agreed to do so even though I was nervous about speaking in front of the body because I was a new apostle. When the President of the church called on me, I told the delegates, "I believe the new name was not just a gift from God, to the members of the church. But more importantly, that the new name was for people outside the church, who were seeking a spiritual home. The new name Community of Christ was welcoming and warm and inviting." And I think it took about a day and a half of discussion, and listening to many delegates give negative and positive comments in their own languages, that the conference voted. The resolution to change the name of the church to Community of Christ passed by an overwhelming majority, and the vote of 1979 in favor and 561 opposed is truly remarkable. The name would become the international church's new name one year later on April 6 2001, because there was a lot of preparation work to be done to change the church's name. But the church would retain the historical name for legal purposes. So Steve, what were your memories and what was your experience during the discussion at World Conference and then the passage of the Church name resolution,

**Steve Veazey** 15:03

I remember being very optimistic, kind of sitting on the edge of my chair a little bit as in the conference setting, we tried to bring a balance to those speaking in favor and those speaking against, so we

alternate. And you may not be able to get a sense of how significantly something may pass or it may not pass, because we're trying to give equal time to people's perspective. But I remember having a sense that this is going to be supported, because of the powerful and insightful testimonies of world church leaders such as yourself, that gave a vision for the future. And those from the church at large, who were supportive around the world. And that was very important too, because the older historical name of the church was very difficult to translate and couldn't be understood or translated in some parts of the world. And I think church leaders found the right balance between representative leaders signaling support so that the conference would be aware of that, but not overwhelming the conference through leadership emphasizing why it should be passed, but signaling support. And then allowing the delegates to have plenty of time to discuss it, so that people would understand it had been a fair process, whatever the outcome was. Well, as you've indicated, the outcome was a significant majority. And those who know our world conferences, know that was a significant majority, especially in relation to a big issue, who voted in favor. And I think as a result of that, the church was at a place where there was more than sufficient unity to move ahead with implementation.

**Linda Booth** 17:25

Yes. And then there was a lot of preparation of work needed to be done to change the church's name. And can you tell us a little bit about that process?

**Steve Veazey** 17:37

Well, I could talk a little bit about the process. But I happen to know that you were right in the middle of leading that process because of your significant experience and responsibilities related to communications and change implementation in the organization. So I think it would be helpful to our listeners if we switched roles. So this time, I would like to pose some questions to you. Because you were one of the co-chairs of the name change process committee? I don't remember the exact title. So how about that? What if I ask you some questions?

**Linda Booth** 18:29

Steve, I'd much rather ask you the questions.

**Steve Veazey** 18:34

I'm sure. Now you know how it feels to be on the other end of questions and answers. But I think I'll go ahead. Let's give it a try. Here's my first question. Changing a church's name is a huge undertaking. There's so many things to consider in terms of the church's, ongoing growing support for the change, implementing the public facing changes, the identity of our church facilities, all of that. So how did you you and your co-chair who was Presiding Bishop Steve Jones, begin?

**Linda Booth** 19:24

Well, our roles in the name change process matched our leadership roles in the church. Presiding Bishop Steve (Jones) took on the financial budget aspects, the legal issues that you mentioned earlier, they were very complex, and changing signs at the Temple and Auditorium in Independence, Missouri, as well as providing financial support for every congregation throughout the world. If they followed the sign guidelines to ensure that all of our signs looked the same or had consistent branding. And Steve (Jones) and his team did a marvelous job. Following April 6, with the name change, a survey was given

to congregations and we learned that a large percentage of congregations change their church signs to reflect the new name and branding. And the summer of 2001, I traveled to six African nations on a ministry assignment with apostle Bunda Chibwe. And I found in villages and towns and cities, there were uniform, beautiful Community of Christ signs outside of about 60 to 80 congregations that we visited it and I came back to tell everyone my goodness, those signs are beautiful, and the people were so proud of their new signs. During my 23 years working for the church, I had a dual leadership role as Apostle and Director of Communications. So the name change fell under my communication hat. And I was really excited about what the new name might mean for communicating who we were or what we were called to be. I was so excited that I didn't really realize how enormous the task would be. Now my background was in public and community relations. And in one previous job, I had been responsible for creating and implementing internal and external communication and multiple events for the opening of a new University of Kansas campus in the Greater Kansas City area. And in another job, I had directed a campaign for a large school district's multimillion dollar bond election. Now those were complex projects, but changing the name of an international denomination was a whole new level of complexity. And within days after the 2000 World Conference, I began to work with the church's very talented communication team on a comprehensive, integrated and complex communication plan. That included for example, a year's worth of internal communication to pastors, and congregations and mission centers, and then external communications to things like radio and television stations, newspapers, magazines, the internet on and on. Plus, we began to think about all the needed tangible resources in multiple languages. Such as a name for...the design for the nameplate—and nameplate is how the name appears or presented in everything from signs to stationery. We began to think about a new church seal, resources, national and local marketing, newspaper ads, television ads, press releases, etc. And so we decided that our staff wasn't large enough to do all that was needed. So we received permission to hire an outside consultant out of Atlanta. And that consulting group had assisted corporations in their name changes as well as a few denominations. While working with them, I learned that the Church of the Brethren had chosen the name Community of Christ for their new name, and the process to get consensus for their denomination had taken years and wasn't completed. Thankfully, we did it more quickly and secured the new name as ours. The consultants also told me after reviewing all the resources produced by our staff, that for such a small denomination, we sure created a lot of excellent resources, which made us all feel really good. We worked with the consulting group on such things as the design of the name plate that I mentioned, how that name of Community of Christ looks. The new church colors, which is a specific bronze and blue, not any blue or bronze, a specific bronze and blue. stationery and envelopes are designed for church signs, guidelines for how to use the nameplate the colors, etc. and a new church seal with a child sitting on the ground with arms around the lion and the lamb.

**Steve Veazey 24:31**

Wow, it sounds exhausting just to listen to all of that. That was a lot of hard work. But we were really blessed by it and we're so glad that you had that professional, previous professional experience and background and training to bring to that moment in the church's life. I I think about the phrase in Scripture "called for such a time as this" where people are kind of matched to opportunities and needs. And I want to affirm that. I remember that that new rendering of the church seal, it was presented to the church in the Herald and on the web. And there were mixed reactions. Some people quickly embraced it, it was already put on some church signs down in Australia. that I've seen and they're still there.

There was even some negative reaction from church members, and some church leaders. Could you tell us a little more about that process?

**Linda Booth 25:42**

Yes, our consultant had advised us that changing images, such as a church seal could be difficult because of people's attachment to them. And so we heard enough negative response, I mean, very vocal negative response. So we stumbled on that one, but we regrouped with a slightly updated church seal with the child still standing between the lion and the lamb. And co-chair, Steve (Jones) worked with a manufacturing company to have the seals replaced in the auditorium chamber and throughout the Temple, and provided opportunities for congregations and mission centers to purchase new seals for their churches. Oh, and we even designed a new church flag that was sold through Herald House, we had a new name, and everything else also became newly designed and produced.

**Steve Veazey 26:41**

Yeah, and I think, again, it was very, it was very helpful. It was almost like a breath of fresh air as we turned to the future. So we're grateful for all of the work and careful thought that occurred. So getting congregations ready for the April 6, 2001 rollout. So we're a year ahead. Now, we've we've moved beyond the World Conference, there's been another year of preparation, it must have been quite a task to get the church ready for that, not just to prepare all of the templates and design but to get the church ready for that. So how did you prepare congregations to step into that change?

**Linda Booth 27:35**

Yeah, well, we realized that some members would feel excited about the new name and and couldn't wait to have the new name on their church signs. And some might feel cautious, not knowing how their community might react, or even what the new name would mean for them personally, or as a congregation. And some might be grieving the loss of the old name they loved and defended, or even resentful of the change. So we tried to address the needs of all those who were experiencing different feelings with the appropriate resources and communication. We provided members and congregations with lots of materials and articles in the Herald on the website and directly into congregations mission centers and homes. And we focused a lot on the communication message on God calling people by new names following transformative or spiritual experiences, such as God who called Abram by the new name, Abraham. Interestingly, I knew a few people during this process that felt called to change their names, like Penny to Penelope, and a man who asked to be called by his middle name Paul. Perhaps one of the most formative things we did to support members in congregations, was a resource, "Called By a New Name" was the name of it, which was a 40 day spiritual journey. The journey started on February 25th of 2001, and was mailed to 70,000 households in the US and Canada. "Called By a New Name" name was translated into French, Tahitian, German, and Spanish and maybe even other languages that I'm not aware of or don't remember. And 1000s of copies in different languages were shipped to mission centers throughout the world and given to members and families. The hope was that the quarter of a million people who belonged to the church would intentionally join in 40 days of prayer, meditation, scripture study, and dialogue, to prepare for Easter and becoming Community of Christ. And I believe in the power of people taking the spiritual journey together. I believe it made a difference in many lives, families, congregations and mission centers. Okay, Steve, I think it's time to switch roles. I've been talking about a process. However, I believe changing our name to Community of Christ was



much more than a process and goes much deeper. The name Community of Christ changed a lot more than church signs and stationery. It challenged all of us to become—or be—Community of Christ. At the 2000 World Conference, delegates approved the following words to be included in the Doctrine Covenants as Section 161. And I'm going to read the last paragraph seven, and listeners when you hear me read Community of Christ, note that the word community is lowercase or not capitalized. These words first pointed us to the wonderful possibilities of being Community of Christ. And I quote: "The Spirit of the One you follow is the spirit of love and peace. That Spirit seeks to abide in the hearts of those who would embrace its call and live its message. The path will not always be easy, the choices will not always be clear, but the cause is sure and the Spirit will bear witness to the truth, and those who live the truth will know the hope and the joy of discipleship in community of Christ. Amen." (Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants 161:7) And following your ordination in 2005, to serve as Prophet President of the church your inspired council brought us words like—and that was in 2007, in Section 163, paragraph one: "'Community of Christ,' your name, given as a divine blessing is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover our future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go." (Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants 163:1) And there's lots of lots of inspired words you brought us, but I'm going to give just one more. And it was in 2010, Section 164:9d. "If you truly would be Community of Christ, then embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ." (Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants 164:9d) And also part of that paragraph, "The mission of Jesus Christ is what matters most for the journey ahead." (Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants 164:9f) And then in 2013, section 165 includes lots of images and language about Christ's mission. So Steve, what impact has the once new name, now our old an established name, Community of Christ, had on us as disciples of Jesus Christ?

### **Steve Veazey 33:20**

Yeah, it's been profound. If you'll allow me to go on a bit of a tangent. When you were talking about the process of implementation in the congregations of the church and the spiritual journey, I just had a flashback of being a field apostle. And my home congregation that I grew up in, in Paris, Tennessee was part of that field. And I visited that area, and I stayed with my folks. And we went to the church building in Paris, and I looked at the sign, and it hadn't been changed yet. And I was with my mother. And I said, "Mama, we got to get that sign changed." And she looked at me and said, "Don't you come down here trying to force us to do things?" So I had to create a new approach. We talked about it and then the next time I traveled through the area the sign was changed. And they embraced it fully. Oh, back to the impact of Community of Christ in terms of the name. The first impulse of inspired council to the church that I was called upon to share began as you read earlier, "Community of Christ." We were being addressed by the Divine in that way, and then the impression, "This is not just a name change. This is a way of blessing the church." And in the name itself, if we continue to explore it—even though we thought we understood a lot about it at the time—if we continue to explore its meaning, then it would serve for us as a pathway into the future. As God's blessings always do. We as a people, a worldwide community of faith, were being blessed with an identity that certainly was faithful to our journey to that point, but especially held potential for the future. It, the name, is our calling. And we are continuing to learn a lot and experience a lot about what it means to engage in authentic community that's Christ-centered, Christ-inspired, that embraces Christ's mission, and even seeks to be a community in which the living Christ continues to be as an expression of what God did in Jesus Christ for all people. And

that's powerful. So, Christ living in communities, is kind of the ultimate expression of the gospel. And so that's the kind of impact that I see, not only during the time since the name change was made, but continuing and perhaps even growing, in terms of our explorations of who we are, and our future.

**Linda Booth** 37:20

Yes, yes, the name has impacted us. But you're right. It is leading us into a future that's going to expand our understanding of what it means to be those authentic communities that are the incarnation of the living Christ in the neighborhoods in which they bless and move and invite others to Christ. Yeah, yeah. Is there anything else you'd like to say about the name change for the future or, or anything else that you might remember, because even just thinking about this podcast brings back images. And even as we've been talking about it now it has brought back remembrances of that time.

**Steve Veazey** 38:07

I might share another little story. Recently, I was a guest instructor in the Community of Christ theology class at Graceland University. And there was a student in the class who is not a member of Community of Christ. But through Graceland, is just curious, interested in who we are as the sponsor of Graceland University. And I had two sessions with the class and toward the end of the last session, this individual asked me to express as succinctly as possible why Community of Christ exists; what do you contribute? And I paused and a lot of gears were turning in my mind, but I finally said, "I think here's what we contribute. As our name says, our witness, our message is that Christian faith is not just a personal or private affair, between the individual and Jesus and it's not just focused on individual salvation. The witness and contribution of Community of Christ is the affirmation that if the gospel is being faithfully taught and lived out, that it will always lead to authentic community. Because it always has to do with our relationships." And this individual kind of paused and then said, "That's important." And I said, "Yeah, that's important." So I think the name has brought us even more completely into understanding our own identity. But that is not a turning inward. That's actually the foundation for sharing our ministry and witness in the world. And I think that is important.

**Linda Booth** 40:38

It is important. And it led us into an understanding of Christ's mission in a new way, and that Christ's mission is our mission. It's definitely outward,

**Steve Veazey** 40:50

Much more Christ-centered, yes, rather than church-centered. And I think it's important that the name is Community of Christ, not Community of Christ church, which I know some people need to explain it that way. But it's Community of Christ. And that talks about a quality of relationships and ways of being together in Christ that becomes a blessing—a visible witness in the world that there's another way to live that's much better. And it's very healing and reconciling. And it leads to peace.

**Linda Booth** 41:38

It does. It does. Thank you so much Steve for agreeing to have a conversation with me about our faith movement's name, Community of Christ. Even though you switched things up and started asking me questions, your vision and prophetic voice continues to bless the church and call us into the future. And thank you Coffee Buzz listeners for joining our conversation. May the name Community of Christ



continued to form your life. To those listeners, seeking a spiritual home Community of Christ is a welcoming, loving worldwide faith community that values the worth of every person as a child of God, and provides a safe space for you to explore and deepen your relationship with Jesus Christ and each other. The Community of Christ—in Community of Christ—you will receive love and support as you discover renewed purpose for your life through compassionate Christ-like service, that ends suffering and fosters justice and peace. Please watch for next month's episode of Coffee Buzz. I'll be having another conversation with Prophet President Steve Veazey. We'll be talking about pursuing Christ's mission after the pandemic.

**Steve Veazey** 42:59

I look forward to it.

**Linda Booth** 43:01

Me too.

**Josh Mangelson** 43:11

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