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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.

Karin Peter 00:33
Welcome. This is Cuppa Joe, where we explore Restoration history here at Project Zion Podcast. And I'm your host for that, Karin Peter. We have a wonderful guest today, his name is Steve Shields, and Steve is an author and historian. And his book, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration,* might be familiar to many of our listeners. Steve grew up in Utah. He's a BYU grad, which I didn't know, Steve.

Steve Shields 01:03
I'm not BYU graduate.

Karin Peter 01:05
Oh, you're not a BYU grad.

Steve Shields 01:07
No, I went there for a year.

Karin Peter 01:09
Went to BYU, all right, joined Community of Christ as a young adult, and served the church in multiple capacities, some of which we will hear about today in our episode. So, Steve, welcome back to Project Zion.

Steve Shields 01:26
Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

Karin Peter 01:29
So, your contribution to the autumn Historic Sites Foundation Church History Series, which this autumn was called, “Without Boundaries”, your lecture was called, “The Church Encounters Asia”. And it begins in Korea. So that's where you are right now. Am I right?

Steve Shields 01:51
That’s where I am right now. Yes.

Karin Peter 01:54
So, you served an LDS mission in Korea, as a missionary, and decades later returned to Korea as a Community of Christ minister and leader, so you of all people are uniquely qualified to introduce us, here at Project Zion, to the history of Community of Christ in Korea. So, let's talk about it. Where do we begin the story of the church in Korea?

Steve Shields 02:22
Well, the story begins in the years following the end of the Korean War. Now, when I say the end of the war, it was simply a ceasefire, armistice agreement. It was not a peace treaty. So technically, the war is still ongoing 70 some years later. The war is conducted mostly by propaganda, you know, and has been for all those decades. The Korean War broke out in June of 1950, and then was finally brought to a ceasefire in 1953. Since the end of the Korean War, the US military presence in Korea has continued to be a rather large presence, much reduced now from what it was in the 1950s and '60s, but in 1954, a young priest from Missouri, by the name of Bill Whenham, was assigned. He joined the army and was sent to Korea as a chaplain's assistant. And during his almost two years here, as a young 1950s, then RLDS Community of Christ church member, he felt that he should share his understanding of the gospel. In his quarters, there were several young teenagers, Korean teenagers, who served as houseboys. 1950s was a desperate time economically in Korea, and the US military officers could, for a few dollars a month, have somebody to polish their boots and, you know, tidy their rooms and do their laundry and those kinds of tasks. And it was a way for those young boys to earn some money for their family to learn English, which then and now is believed to be a real asset for success. The group of young boys, and they would come to church at the base chapel, yeah, they were, base chapels are not denomination specific, necessarily, if anyone's familiar with the US military chaplaincy system, but gave them opportunities to learn English, to interact with Americans, which in the 1950s was a real step-up on the social ladder. Over several months, Bill, who was alone there, as far as I know, there were no other church members in his area, there were some in Seoul. But Bill was down in the Busan area which is, let me see, it's about 350 miles away. And in the 1950s, transportation was not easy. There were no paved highways. There was the railroad, but US military people didn't just hop on the train and come to Seoul for the weekend. It just wasn't done. So, Bill, on his own basically organized this small congregation of about 15 young people, and in November of 1954, baptized all of them in the ocean near Busan. And that was the beginnings of the church in Asia. We had church members after World War II in Japan, but they didn't really do much with people. They weren't pushing church much. The first baptisms in Japan didn't take place till a year later, and then it was only one or two people. Whereas in Korea, by that point in 1955-56, we had close to 50 or 60 in Korea. Bill, of course, was reassigned to the US and many of those young people made their way to Seoul because in those days, even now, Seoul is where it's happening, and half of the population of South Korea lives in the Seoul metropolitan area. That's 25 million people in the metropolitan area. And in the old days this is where the factories were, this is where jobs were. And so, a lot of those young boys who now could speak English, they were able to get some pretty decent jobs in Seoul and over the next few years, a few US military people and you know, had little meetings and whatever, but it took a while to get things pulled together. But that's where it began. And Charles Neff was the apostle who was assigned to Asia. After that, I think Neff's first visit was 1958. And then over the next couple of decades, Neff became the chief leader of Community of Christ in Asia and planted the church in the Philippines, planted the church in India, and he lived in Tokyo for several years with his family as he oversaw the Asia mission area.

Karin Peter 08:00
So, we've explored both India and Philippines with David Howlett. We've learned a little bit about Chuck Neff. What I'm interested in, before we go on, is those few years between this little group of young

people in the Busan, area 350 miles from Seoul, and then Neff's visit in '58. What happened to bring him?

Steve Shields 08:23
Well, some of those young people came to Seoul and there were some church people, American church people in Seoul, and they were also talking with other people, and the group kind of just developed over time. It wasn't consistent. It wasn't official. And one young man in particular, who was in the first group baptized, his name was Lee Hae-jun or Hae-jun Lee in the American style. He was kind of the chief instigator in Seoul. He was enthusiastic, and we see his name cropping up all along the early history of the church and made connections with people who made other connections with people and by the late '50s, there was an informal group of people meeting, who invited, they'd written and asked Neff to come. Now, they didn't ask Neff personally. They asked the church to send somebody, and it happened to be Chuck Neff and Blair Jensen who were both in the Council of Twelve Apostles. So, Hae-jun Lee, probably, if we were to write the history would be the, you know, the primary Korean native church member who really kept the ball rolling from what Bill Whenham had started back in 1954.

Karin Peter 10:03
So, it's a wonderful testament, Steve, to people really wanting to live out their witness.

Steve Shields 10:10
Yes.

Karin Peter 10:11
Really wanted to share that, even without official support.

Steve Shields 10:14
Right, and they started having regular worship services, not having lots of experience or patterns to follow. There were, of course, Christianity has been in Korea for a long time, and you know there was not ignorance of Christian church and most Christian churches in Korea continue to this day to be pretty much like what you would find in the US of opening hymn, and a prayer, and a sermon, and an offertory and a hymn, and a prayer. You know that pattern is pretty standard and so they had some models. They didn't have a lot of resources in those days. There were hymn books in Korean. The Bible was in Korean, and had been for decades, so those were, you know, at least some resources. Hae-jun Lee was able to go to Graceland College later in 1950s, and church members helped provide money for him to go. He spent five years at Graceland in the 1950s. I forget exactly what year he graduated, that might have been '59. Anyway, during his time at Graceland, he kind of was mother-henned by Roy Cheville. Now for lifelong Community of Christ, RLDS church members, Doc Cheville is quite a prominent personality. Newer folks wouldn't know him because he's been gone for about 30 years now. But Roy Cheville was probably the most favorite teacher at Graceland in the 1940s and '50s '60s, into the '60s maybe. He was probably one of the best educated professors that we had at the time having graduated from University of Chicago with a doctorate. He kind of took Lee Hae-jun under his wing and together they translated the Book of Mormon into Korean. That was not published until 20 years later but, you know, that was just the project that in those days was felt to be really important as far as

promoting the church. The Book of Mormon and some of those more traditional views were very important to those years and, of course, Doc Cheville couldn't speak, read or understand Korean but, as Lee worked on the book and had questions, Doc Cheville was probably one of the most expert scholars about The Book of Mormon. Doc Cheville's book was called, I think, *The Book of Mormon Speaks for Itself*, something of that nature, where he was probably the first Latter-day Saint scholar of any brains who said we don't need to worry about historicity issues or how it came to be. Let's look at the message. Let's look at the content. And so, it was from that perspective that the book was translated by Hae-jun Lee and that became very formative for Hae-jun, for Lee, and it became foundational for his later ministry as a pastor here in Korea.

Karin Peter 14:01
So, as you kind of walked through the lecture and talked about the different aspects of the church in Korea, you divided it into three kind of themes, if you will. At least that's what I kind of picked out as I watched the lecture. And they were first, the Restoration message and how that was shared and received. And then you talk about a period of relief or social ministries, welfare ministries, social justice kinds of ministries. And then you talk about the constant rotation of missionaries and staff. And each of those kind of eras, if you will, of the church in Korea, had a very different effect on the church and what happened. So, let's start with the Restoration message and the kind of that period in the life of the church. You talk about what really was an export of US Western identity and culture. So, can you talk a little bit about that period?

Steve Shields 15:06
Well, when you come from a perspective of being the only true church, which was certainly our perspective in 1950s Community of Christ, there's little question about what the message should be. Now, Apostle Neff later argued that we needed something other than, "we're not the Mormons", kind of message.

Karin Peter 15:35
Well, God bless him.

Steve Shields 15:36
Well, but that didn't happen until he really started engaging in Japan. In Korea, that was a easy message, because Korea had a large Christian foundation already, where Japan didn't. And so, there was no question about, Who was Jesus Christ? What was the gospel about? What was salvation about? That was already well established in Korea. So, the Community of Christ message in those days wasn't too off beat. Even though, in those days, the Christian population was not big, it was well known because the Protestant missionaries had had such an impact on Korean society all through the years of the Japanese occupation, which took place from 1910 to 1945 here. It was the Western missionaries who kind of held the country together, in some respects, who held the Korean country together. The Japanese government over Korea was one thing, but people saw the church, and the missionaries of those years had to be very careful, because they were being watched. They were Westerners. Eventually, by the time World War II got really underway, Japan expelled all of the Allied nations' missionaries. The Germans stayed, but there weren't any missionaries among the Germans. Japan was part of the Axis nations that were tied up with, and even some of our church members who

grew up during those years, one lady in the 1990s, during a visit from then Counselor in the Presidency, Bud Sheehy, she commented to him that she was so impressed with his leadership at World Conference. It reminded her of Hitler. And you know that, yeah, you raised your eyebrows. I saw that. But remember when she was growing up, Germany and Japan were allies. And so, Hitler was a prominent epitome of leadership. Even *Time* magazine noted Hitler as “Man of the Year” one year.

Karin Peter 18:09
We look at it from our perspective now and we have a hard time recognizing it.

Steve Shields 18:14
And, of course, President Sheehy was taken aback by that comment. And so, I had to explain the background. But, you know, so you had that very Western oriented society here where Japan didn't have it. Yes, there were Western missionaries in Japan, but the impact of Christianity in Japan, even today, less than 1% of Japanese are Christians. And in Korea, the population census figures suggest that we're around 28% of the population identify as Christians. So, it's a huge difference and that has always been the case. The Community of Christ in Korea has always had at least three times the membership of Community of Christ in Japan.

Karin Peter 19:03
So, it makes sense that it would be more important to be denominationally significant than just the Christian message.

Steve Shields 19:11
The very first tract that we published in Korean here was, here's how we're different from the Mormons. And that message made sense to a lot of people. The LDS Church came in at the end of World War II, because of the heavy US military presence and, you know, simply population numbers of church membership would suggest there'd be more Mormons in the US military than there were Community of Christ members. Though, and you know, Mormons, as most people know, are quite aggressive in their missionary zeal. And, you know, they had a message that resonated with many Koreans in the aftermath of World War II and through the Korean War. So, that was not an unknown quantity here. Whereas in Japan, and that's where Apostle Neff later, you know, pushed the church that we need something talking about Christianity not about Mormons. That was more appropriate for Japan than necessary in Korea. But he was still right, no matter what. But our traditional message, and Les Gardner, who was one of the early missionaries here, and you know I want to explain to our listeners who all these people are and why they're important, but we don't have time to go into all that. But Les was one of the first missionaries, he and his wife. He made his wife famous when they got married. She became Ava Gardener, but not the Ava Gardner of film, but anyway.

Karin Peter 20:51
Most of our listeners are young enough they won't know who you’re talking about.

Steve Shields 20:54
They won’t even know Ava Gardener, will they. Oh, dear. Well, yeah, you know, the time just keeps marching on.

Karin Peter 21:03
But, let's get back to this idea of the restoration message.

Steve Shields 21:08
Right. Les and I talked about this not too long ago and he said, "Well, I've never been one that says we're the only true church and if you don't join us, you'll burn in hell." He said, "But, the message that ordinary people like Joseph Smith, or like you, or like me, can approach God and have a connection." And so, you know that part of the Restoration message, and we've kind of still got that. Restoration for us is not a once and only event. It's an ongoing lifestyle, maybe, to put it in a way, where not only did we feel that the church structure needed to be restored. More than that, in Les's mind, that the mindset of what Restoration is about, about renewal, about reinvigoration, about finding new ways to live in a changing world, was kind of the message that he pushed, and so it's not surprising that from his perspective the social ministry stuff was not a leap. It was part and parcel of what restoration meant.

Karin Peter 22:34
So, let's move into that kind of period. So, we have this where the church is introduced and people hear the message and they join and that's wonderful and then this idea of what can we do to make people's lives better? We're still talking about an impoverished area. Let's talk about that area a little bit.

Steve Shields 22:58
In the 1950s and '60s, well into the '70s, Korea was an impoverished nation. It wasn't difficult to find ways to help. And from an American perspective, where comparatively we were extraordinarily wealthy, and because of the other social dynamics that were going on in the 60s, for example, our church in Korea had an APO address, US military postal address, and we were allowed, people were allowed to send things to the church in Korea through the American military postal system, at US prices, and no customs clearances, and things like that. That all changed later, but in those early years, any American-based organization, even though we were incorporated in Korea independently as a Korean church, any American influenced organization could use the US military system, and a lot of our early folks, American folks, had access even to the commissary base which is long been denied anybody who's not US military now. So, it was in the area where the church chose to buy some land in Seoul for the first church building. And I've got photos of that in my lecture with church historic sites, and we talk a little bit about that. But there was no road out to that land other than a dirt trail, of muddy trail, most of the year and the railroad line. Along the railroad bed was a shantytown. The neighborhood where the church bought land was a village of straw-thatched, mud huts and tents, where Koreans lived, farmed. And so, we bought this little hilltop, and soon as the doors opened, people came flocking to the church looking for help, because churches had already built a reputation of helping others. It wasn't just us. So, it was easy to get secondhand clothing from the US. In those days, the Center Stake, in Independence, had a thrift shop where people could donate unused things for repurposing. They sent truckloads of clothing to Korea and that was distributed from the church to any comer. There were no strings attached. Many of those people, in gratitude, joined the church because that was the appropriate response to show thanks was to be part of that community. Les also said that he believed that when all was said and done that most of those people had no clue, or weren't committed to Community of Christ and what it

was all about. They were there because of gratitude for the help they had received and hope for more assistance to come along. That's not a bad thing. That's what we do, you know.

Karin Peter 26:32
Yeah, I think, if we're honest, a lot of people come to church for the relationship, for the community, for the support, for the help, if you will.

Steve Shields 26:41
Well, I go to church, because of the people. I don't go to church because I feel like I need to have some sanctified sermon, you know, poured into my brain. I go because of the people. It's all about relationships. And in the Korean culture, relationships are really important. A man at church who had graduated from high school 30 years before still is connected to other people who graduated from that high school, even though he's never met them. And when they meet and they see on their lapel they've got a pin from that high school, “Ah we're brothers!” And immediately there's a connection and the younger guy always has to help the older guy. And it's not out of duty, it's just out of a sense of relationship that, “Yes, you know, he's retired. I'm employed. I need to help my older, you know, predecessor.” Alumni associations in the US context don't even come close to that kind of a connectedness here. So, many of those early church people, even though economic circumstances gave them opportunities to better their lives and move away, I still meet people today who were members in the 1960s, occasionally. There's not too many left anymore. But they haven't been to our building in 50 years, but they still identify as members of that church. “Oh, yes. I'm a member of the church in Yonhi-dong,” but they may attend some Methodist church or a Presbyterian church, or whatever. Bill Whenham came back to Korea in early 2000s and wanted to be connected with people that he had known earlier on, and we were able to track down quite a number of those people, and you know, one who had been a young man that Bill had baptized, and you know, been active in our church. but then he moved to another city, got a job, and so he started attending a local Presbyterian church. But he still identified as a member of our church in his mind, you know. He was still connected relationally with us. Often, we feel like in order to be baptized, you need to know the history of the church, and the Enduring Principles, by heart, the basic beliefs, and then you can be baptized. That was not how it worked in those days. That's not how it works today. Yeah, we do preparation for baptism teaching, but we don't have a test at the end of all of that and we realize that it's about the relationships with others. It's not whether or not you can recite all of the Enduring Principles in the proper order. And so, Les, in many ways, was kind of in early years of that sort of ministry. He and Ralph and Beryl Ferrett were here. They had come a little earlier than Les. The first on the ground of formal missionary was Bill Guthrie. Bill and Jane Guthrie were the first appointee family who were sent by the church to live in Korea. Bill's job was to buy church land and get a building built. He was joined later by Ralph and Beryl Ferrett from Australia and then they were joined after Bill and Jane went back home. They were joined by Les and Ava and their family. Les is Australian. Ava was an American. I think they met at Graceland. But so, you know, the Australian church was always a bit more progressive in my mind than the US church, as far as it came to, you know, what is the essential requirement to become a church member. We were pretty conservative in the 1950s and ‘60s in the US. And pretty much all you got to go by the book, you know, and there was more of an official line that once we got out of the US context there was a little more flexibility. And Les was very much social ministry oriented, and even though he was strapped with administrative duties, trying to learn the

language, he spent a lot of his effort organizing youth camps that went to some village, and they built a bridge over a stream in one place. And the outgrowth of all of that was also building a clinic down in a rural area that had no access to medical resources and Esme Smith who was another Australian, that basically Korea was the Australia mission in some ways. Esme Smith was then a young nurse who had come to Korea to teach, and then wanted to stay on, and we built this clinic, and she staffed the clinic. She was later joined by another nurse, Dorcas Wilkinson, and her husband who came with their oldest son as a babe in arms. Their second son was born down in that little village in the clinic, delivered by Esme and Larry, as I recall. But this village was so far out of anywhere. I've seen letters that Esme would write to Seoul to Les or Ralph and say, "Next time anybody comes down, I sure could use a bottle of shampoo." I mean just not even the basic stuff was available. It was so far out of the way. But it was an area where they, in this whole valley, there were maybe 20 villages and they were able to provide lots of basic health care tips. Esme would run around to all the elementary schools with boxes of toothbrushes and teach the schoolchildren how to brush their teeth. Later on, when I got here in the '90s, one of my first secretaries was one of those schoolgirls, little elementary school kid who had gotten a toothbrush from Esme. She didn't make the connection between our church and Esme until she and I drove down to that village to see if the old clinic building was still standing. And it was. And as we stood there in this empty ruined building, looking out over the valley she said, "Well, see that village over there about 10 miles across the valley?" She said, "Well, I grew up there." And she said, "Come to think of it, I have this memory of a white lady coming to school with toothbrushes." Small world? Yeah. So, even though we didn't have thousands of church members, those social ministries bettered the lives of countless people and it's difficult to quantify that. You don't have it on a list of church members or a list of donors, but should that restrict our ministry? No, I don't think so. That Restoration principle is a powerful foundation for what we do with social outreach and helping others, without strings attached, to have something a little bit better.

Karin Peter 34:26
You're talking about the ministries that we now would call Abolishing Poverty and Ending Needless Suffering. We didn't have that language, but that's what we're talking about.

Steve Shields 34:36
Exactly what we're talking about. So, in that regard, we were very successful, even though we don't have thousands of congregations and thousands of people sitting in the church buildings here.

Karin Peter 34:48
Those kinds of stats.

Steve Shields 34:49
Yeah.

Karin Peter 34:50
So, you talk about the different staff people that were there. This is something that was a kind of a critical issue for Korea, this constant rotation of staff. And you talk about it in your lecture too. So, I want to talk about two aspects of that. One of them is, who are some of the folks who served in Korea? You

mentioned Les and Ava Gardner, the Guthries, some others. Who are some of your favorite people that have stories that we would like to hear?

Steve Shields 35:22
Well, all of them.

Karin Peter 35:26
We don't have that much time!

Steve Shields 35:27
There aren't that many. Bill and Jane Guthrie were here. They were joined by Ralph and Beryl Ferrett. Bill and Jane had to go back to the states. Jane had some serious health issues, so that cut short their time here. And then Les and Ava came. And then Les decided that he really wanted to do higher education, so he went to University of Hawaii. So, they left. Phil and Darlene Caswell came and then Phil and Darlene Caswell were the last resident, non-Korean leaders of the church here until I came 20 years after Phil and Darlene had returned to the US.

Karin Peter 36:07
So, we have a little bit of a break there.

Steve Shields 36:09
Well, there was a break and Phil was called into the Council of Twelve, and they put the church in charge of a good Korean priesthood member, but it was challenging because this man was a university professor, dean of the college of the graduate school, and was just phenomenally busy with his work. And there wasn't time. Now, his name was Cho Han-guk. Dr. Cho would be, you know, probably, of all the Korean personalities, is one of the top five, maybe. He did what he could to provide leadership. The social ministry things changed because the Korean economy developed, and some of the things we had been doing weren't necessary anymore. But one thing that we could do, and this was organized under Phil Caswell and then continued under Dr. Cho for some time, was a girls' middle school. And in those early days, middle school and high school were tuition-based. Elementary school was free. Middle school was tuition-based and most families didn't have that kind of money. It was very difficult, especially when it came to, we have a boy and a girl. Who gets the money for school? Well, Korean society is still rather patriarchal. It was the boy. The girl was going to get married and not support her family anyway. She'd support her husband's family, so it didn't matter that much in the mindset. So, we offered a free middle school, girls' middle school. We didn't have any church people involved in teaching. We didn't have qualified educators, but the church sponsored it. We even built a classroom building on the grounds of the church to accommodate the needs of the school. And over seven or eight years, we offered middle school education to several hundred young girls in the area, a worthwhile ministry. And many of them came to church on Sundays, and many of them were baptized, and, you know, I mean. And when I was here in the '90s, many of them would come looking for their certificate of graduation and the records, which we still had. And they, "Oh yeah. I really love coming to this church, but I live so far away now, I can't get here." So, there was still that relational connection. But by the early 1980s, the Korean government made middle school free of tuition, so that ministry was no longer needed. And we couldn't become a public school because it wasn't a public school. And so,

that was closed down, and so, what do we do now? By 1988, when the Seoul Olympics took place, and that's a key turning point in Korean history, in modern Korean history, is the Seoul Olympics of 1988, South Korea entered the world stage in a big way that year, and the economy really started just rolling along at high speed. By the time I got here, less than 10 years after the Olympics, the standard of living in Korea was comparable to the United States. And so, the kinds of social ministries that we had offered in the '60s were no longer needed. Yes, there's still some poverty in Korea. Yes, there's still some homeless people in Korea, but it's hard to find where we can help in those kinds of ways. So, we had to retool. But you know, Phil and Darlene Caswell, you know, they raised their two boys here. Les and Ava Gardner, you know, had their two or three. I can't remember how many children they have. That's terrible. I can't remember that. But I didn't know the kids. You know, I only knew Les and Ava later. The Ferretts had a couple of sons here. One of the Ferrett's boys rode his tricycle off the roof of the house and fell about 20 feet. And that was quite a horrible. The mission houses had flat roofs and there were no railings. He took his tricycle up on the roof and was fooling around on the roof.

Karin Peter 40:54
And I'm hoping he survived fine?

Steve Shields 40:58
He survived the fall. His mother survived that fall, too. But it was it was pretty scary. You know, when your small child has a fall like that. I mean, it's pretty scary. So, they, you know, they certainly have some stories to tell. You know, it just, it was hard. Life was hard for those families. When we built the building on the hill outside, it was outside of the city. There were no paved roads at the time. There was no electricity out there. We got, the church got an award from the Seoul city government for extending the power line to the neighborhood where we were, because then from that, they could electrify the neighborhood. But we paid to put the poles in and stretch the line out to the church property because our Western missionaries needed electricity to live.

Karin Peter 41:59
We got an award for it.

Steve Shields 42:01
Yeah, we got an award for it. But in a way, that was a social ministry too, because it provided a resource for that neighborhood to become electrified. Life was hard. Food resources, where you didn't go to the supermarket to buy groceries. You went to the open market. And, you know, "Oh, yes. We want some chicken." and you catch the live one that's running in the cage and say, "Well, I want that red one." And they would whack its head off and strip it right there for you. That, just even for 1960s Americans, was still kind of much for many of those.

Karin Peter 42:39
Americans are having TV dinners and watching the Jetsons? Yes.

Steve Shields 42:43
The missionaries' wives had a real difficult time, I think. And because we were still of the mindset that they were the wives so they were the ones that should take care of the home and this and that. When I

came in ‘96, the church ladies were quite worried about me because I didn't have a wife. “Well, who will do your laundry? they asked me. “Well, who will cook your meals?” they ask. “Well, who will clean your house?” And when I said, “Well, I'll do it.” And they'll say, “But you're a man. You don't know how to do those things.” Which, in a grand context of that generation, the men didn't do any of that stuff. They didn't know how, really. They didn't know how. But I was taught well by my mother. I knew how to cook. I knew how to do laundry. Now, my mother would be horrified at how I do laundry because I don't do all the fancy separation that she did. I just throw it in, but you know, I tell my friends I clean my house whenever it needs it. So, my mother wouldn't...

Karin Peter 43:51
I know a lot of people who follow that philosophy, Steve.

Steve Shields 43:53
Well, you know, there's more to life than cleaning my house. And so, but I can do it. I know how to do it, and it's not dirty. Seoul has a lot of dust. And you know, I’ll dust this morning and by evening I need to dust again some days. It's just, you know, you can't get away from it. So, you know, those early missionary wives. There wasn't much for them to do. There weren't a lot of social outlets for them. They weren't offered the opportunity to learn the language. And none of the early missionaries ever really learned the language fully. They simply didn't have time, because of all their other duties. And that, among a few other points, has been a real problem for us here in Korea. I came with the language already because somebody else paid for that learning. But my successors have not had the language. We've made rather feeble attempts at giving them language training. And, you know, everybody has a different aptitude for learning language. So, some of them, after three or four years of working here got to the point where they could have simple conversations across the table after church. They could read a sermon that somebody else had translated and written out for them in Korean. But they really couldn't speak the language. And Jack Kirkpatrick asked me one time, he said, “Well, how long does it take to learn the language?” And I said, “Well, 40 years on, I'm still learning.” And I still learn. I still learn new words every day, and I write them down and learn my new vocabulary, and it's an ongoing thing, and developing. But more than the language, developing a trusting relationship takes about seven years. Most of our missionaries have barely spent seven years on the ground here. So, just at the point where they're beginning to develop that, you know, finally break through the barriers and develop a trust, we take them out. As we mentioned earlier, people in Korea are very relational. My immediate successor was angry with me because I wouldn't let go of the people after I was reassigned to another task in the church. Well, I didn't even have any communication with most of them. But it's not like in the US where the new mission center president is sustained at a conference and we shake hands and the old mission center president is gone and we move on. Doesn't work that way in Korea. You know, you had the Caswell Church. You had the Ferrett and Gardener Church. You had the Steve Church. You had the Gary Logan Church, you know, because of relationship. So, after me, Gary Logan became the leader and oh, no, there was a couple from Arizona, Rob and Barb Mills. They overlap. They had come on a Transformation 2000 program or something. Oh, and before them was Elizabeth Else from Seattle. I can't not mention her. Elizabeth, probably has been the best at relational ministry. I told her one time, when we were working together here, that she had the spiritual gift of hospitality. And a lot of people don't see that as a spiritual gift. They don't think that's as important as talking in tongues, let's say. She was so good with especially the older women and the young adult women in the church. After services,

she hosted little tea parties at her house and continues to have a significant impact on the church here in Korea. She has been back a couple of times after her initial time here to help fill in on a volunteer basis, so on. But she had a great impact. Gary Logan was not full-time resident. He would come and spend a few months and then do other things and then come. And then he was replaced full-time by Adam and Beck Wade from Australia again. And Adam tried his hand at learning the language through a local university program, but it wasn't enough. But there was no funding provided for him to do anything more. Adam was pulled out early because he was put in the Presidents of Seventy. And so, he and Beck were here three and a half, it was either three and a half or four and a half years. I'd have to look somewhere to figure that out exactly. But Adam was just getting to the point where he could have a table conversation. And most of that was learning on his own and some of the church folks kind of coaching him. But he was given one semester at the University of the language class, which met three hours a week, and then was pulled out in the middle of that for a few weeks for other duties for the church so he never could get caught up. So, that it wasn't afforded the opportunity to even have formal training. That's a failure on our part, as an institution to not see that as critical to ministry in a place that English is not an official language, although many people speak a little. But then, after Adam, we assigned Blair White, and he was in the assignment only about a year when some family situations took place and they had no choice but to do something different. Blair, as many of our Seeker friends will know, was in Salt Lake City for a number of years working with our Latter-day Seeker Ministry. After Blair, Matt Swain and his wife, Irina from Canada came, and they just left two days ago, after five and a half years. But again, you know, Matthew was getting to the point where he could kind of have a nice chat across the table with people. His little girl spoke Korean much better than he did because the aunties at church would always speak to her in Korean, and she went to a kindergarten or a daycare center, preschool, whatever, I don't know what it's called in English. And it was a Korean speaking preschool, and so they only spoke Korean there. So, Joy, who's just four and a half, speaks pretty good Korean. And Beck and Adam's, youngest son, I want to say William but I'm not, there's two boys, anyway, he went to the same kind of a kindergarten and his Korean was pretty good too. But adults don't have that ability to learn so quickly. So, now that Matt and Irina are gone, we're left with no resident missionary from outside. We have, I mean, we only have our volunteers at church, which is not unlike how we do it in the US and other developed places. The difference here is that most of these folks here don't have any other model than what they see in other Protestant churches. And they know that we're not that. In fact, when it came to dealing with our Disciples Generous Response materials, the word *tithing* is a terrible word for our church people. They don't want to use the word *tithing*, because all the other Protestants use it, and it's a negative thing. If you don't pay your tithing, you're gonna burn in hell attitude. And they said, "We don't want to use tithing. Can we just use offering?" And I said, "Well, but there's a principle. How do we teach the principle without using the word?" Because the word *tithing* only means one tenth. I mean, it's only a number word. It has no other meaning. But most of Protestant Christianity here in Korea is very, ultra conservative, not very, it's ultra conservative, it's very strict. They actually publish how much money you've donated this week to church by name. And the peer pressure is just absolutely horrendous. "Oh, well, Karin, you only gave $100 at offering last week? Surely you can do more than that. Your husband has a great job." You know, that kind of peer pressure is devastating. But that's not what we teach in Disciples Generous Response. It's a response of generosity. It's not an obligation to meet the peer pressure of others in the church who might be donating more. The "Widow's Mite" story comes to mind. You know, they do exactly what the Pharisees were promoting, these other Protestant churches, not what Jesus was saying. And now,

they'll disagree with me, but we've tried to be really good about it here in Korea, in the Community of Christ, when we translate things into Korean, when we teach principles, we've tried to be more welcoming, more embracing of people without any strings attached. You know, I don't care how much you pay in tithing. It's not important. But when you donate to the church, and you do it generously, that's what, the Spirit of that's important. Yeah, we need money to pay for the electricity. Yeah, you know, there is that practical end of things. But people will rise to that challenge rather than, “You need to pay 10% or else,” kind of a attitude. So, we've tried to do the opposite of that. So how will this work for us now with only volunteers? I am not taking a leading role. It's not appropriate for me to do that. I'm a previous pastor here. I'm a retired world church appointee field minister. I'm a high priest, which means something in our system, but it doesn't mean much to our church people here because they don't have any other models. And I’ve deliberately worked out with Matthew that I would not try to outshine him or second guess him. And, you know, we had a very, you know, and he was, every now and again, he'd call me to task, which was fine. I wanted that. I needed that. And so, I made it very clear, as we knew that a year ago that Matthew would be leaving. I said, Well, some of the church ladies said, “Well, what about you, Steve? Can you become the pastor again? And I said, “No, absolutely not. It's not appropriate for me to do that.” Well, why not? Well, this is a church in Korea. It's a Korean church. We have priesthood members, Korean priesthood members who are good people. They have good skills. We have one priest, who I think she's our best preacher of all. Young, well, I call her a young woman, she's in her early 50s, recently widowed lady. Her husband suddenly died of a heart attack unexpectedly about a year ago, two years ago maybe. She has just really risen to the top and shined. She's a marvelous leader. That's, you know, I'll support her from behind. If she wants me to preach one time or do a prayer once in a while or whatever, and asked me to do it, I'll do it. But I'm not pushing myself on the church. I think we can grow. I think we can learn. I think we can develop leadership skills. We need to develop leadership skills among the local, native folks. I don't like that word, *native*. That's not the right word, the local Koreans. There's one other priesthood member who is an American. She came years ago in World Service Corps, came back to teach English because there just weren't any jobs at home, and she likes Korea. She loves Korea. She fell in love with a Korean guy. They're married. She may be here permanently, you know. But again, the Koreans need to, you know, develop this now. And if she and I can be supportive, you know, help develop them, and she and I talked about this, you know, we'll do our part. We'll help, but we're not going to push into it. And, you know, I don't want to have anything to do with church finances, or problems, or people problems, because I'm an external element. That, yes, maybe I can help do some reconciliation work, but if it's really going to work long term, it's got to be the Koreans who do it. I am not a Korean, no matter how long I’ve lived here, no matter how well I can speak the language or not. I will never be a Korean. My American tapes are too deeply embedded in my brain, and that's been the challenge for all of us, my predecessors, my successors, who were not Koreans, is that we are still who we were when we grew up. And we try to be sensitive, but we have a directness, you know, most Westerners have a directness in the way we do things and the way we talk that is not appropriate in Korean cultural context. It's too overbearing, and Korea has long moved from being the younger brother of America. And in the church, we need to do that. The church in Korea is not the younger brother of the American church, or sister. I didn't mean to be sexist, in the general way, but Korea can do it themselves. Koreans can do it themselves. Koreans are highly educated now, very dynamic, you know, people who know what's going on in the world around them. They're not sheltered anymore. The economy is strong, it has its hiccups, just like the US and European economies do, but, you know, unemployment is low, and of course those figures done

by the government are very different. But you know, schools are available. Children go through high school without tuition now. I mean, they can go to a specialty school where they have to pay tuition but public schools are free. College education is not a $100,000 student loan proposition every year. Even medical school here is reasonable. Medical skills here are top notch. Medical equipment is top notch because Korea doesn't have to use American made equipment. They get the best of German engineering and technology and medical equipment. You know, so living here long term, I have no hesitation going to a Korean doctor. Even for open heart surgery, I wouldn't hesitate. But what I'm saying is the Korean church people can do this on their own, and they need to. That's the bottom line.

Karin Peter 1:00:48
And because we're in it together, we appreciate that you are there to support...

Steve Shields 1:00:53
Well...

Karin Peter 1:00:53
...and to love, and to be in relationship, as you've talked about being the most important thing. Well, we've come to the end of our time, Steve. Before we go, I just want to ask you if you could briefly, like a sentence or two, if you had to say just a short sentence, how your ministry experience in Korea has shaped you as a disciple, what would you say?

Steve Shields 1:01:16
Oh, my word. My eyes really got opened. I was a young, rural Utah boy from a small town, who came to the big city and learned that a lot of people back in the '70s didn't have enough food to eat. I'd never seen that upfront. I think that's probably when I was an LDS missionary here, I probably became a Community of Christ church member without knowing it. Because I could not, I had difficulty with the idea that, doesn't matter if you don't have food to eat, you got to join the church or you'll be burning in hell. And that just was not how I was taught when I grew up. But that began my transformation, and it took a few years after that before I made the switch. And then subsequently, you know, I built on that foundation when I came in the '90s. And I realized, as Les Gardner realized, that people were more important than institution, in many respects, and that to push people into baptism, rather than inviting them to consider it, not a way to sell Fuller Brushes, I suppose. But I was very low key because of all of that experience. And, you know, did I want people to join me and what I had found? Sure, I did, I do still. But I began to realize that there's a lot of trails up to the peak of the mountain, which the peak we call God in our language, other people call it, you know, other religious traditions call it something else, maybe. But I think we're all on the same mountain, we're just on different trails. And I would have never thought that way 25, 30 years ago. I, just was not a way I could think. That's what Korea did for me was see that there was there, are. I had Buddhists come to me and say, "Steve, the Christians say that I'm gonna burn in hell as a Buddhist. What do you say?" I say, "Well, no." I said, "If you're a good Buddhist and follow the teachings of Buddha, I don't have a problem with that." "Well, but you're a Christian. You're supposed to make me give up paganism and join Christianity." And I said, "Well, no. I'm not supposed to do that at all. If you are a Buddhist, be the best Buddhist you can be. If Buddhism is not doing it for you, then come and check us out." I'm more of a Universalist, I think, these days, than I ever was. So that's, you know, that's what Korea did for me.

Karin Peter 1:04:25
And I appreciate you sharing that with us, with our listeners, who maybe have felt at times pressured to think certain things or believe certain things, to hear that relationship is primary, relationship, as the doctrine of covenants says, with God, with others, with yourself, with the earth. I want to thank you for being our guest today and helping us learn more about the beginnings of the church in Asia. And for our listeners, we encourage you to go and view Steve's lecture about the church in Korea and see those great photos of the places he talked about. And the other lectures from the “Church Without Boundaries” on the lecture series. And you can find that at the historicsitesfoundation.org website. This is “Cup of Joe”, part of the Project Zion Podcast. I'm Karin Peter, been visiting with Steve Shields. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 1:05:27
Thanks for listening to Project Zion Podcast subscribe to our podcast on apple podcast stitcher or whatever podcast streaming service you use and while you're there give us a five star rating Project Zion Podcast is sponsored by Latter-day Seeker Ministries of Community of Christ the views and opinions expressed in this episode are of those speaking and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Latter-day Seeker Ministries or Community of Christ music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinze.