

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 21st episode of Coffee Buzz, a podcast conversation with a member of Community of Christ First Presidency. My name is Linda Booth. I became the host of this Project Zion Podcast soon after retiring from serving nearly 23 years as an apostle in Community of Christ and as the church's Director of Communications. In this Coffee Buzz episode, I'm talking with my dear friend, President Scott Murphy, who serves as a counselor to Prophet/President Steve Veazey. Now some of you may not know that Scott also serves as a Director of Field Ministries, which means he supervises members of the Council of Twelve Apostles and directs and supports ministries around the world. He and I worked very closely together when I served as President of the Council of Twelve Apostles. I really appreciated Scott's passion for Christ's mission, his pastoral sensitivity, and his support of me and for the members of the Council. Welcome, friend. I'm sure Coffee Buzz listeners would be interested in what your responsibilities are in your roles as Counselor to President Veazey and as Director of Field Ministries. So, is it possible to briefly tell us what you do?

Scott Murphy 01:51

Well, first, it's good to see you and be with you, Linda, and the listeners, and thank you very, for your very fine and very complimentary words there in the introduction, so great to be with everyone today. Um, yeah, so let me try and see if I can provide just a brief overview. So, in our role and responsibilities as counselors to President Veazey, uh, Stassi Cramm and I really kind of function, if I was to put it into kind of corporate language, we really function as Chief Operating Officers for the church. So, this model really allows President Veazey the needed time and space to give attention to the, to the vision, mission and spiritual direction of the church without being burdened with the, the overall administrative aspects of the church. But ultimately, as the three of us form the body of the First Presidency, the three of us really work in a very collaborative and integrative way. Steve, Steve just has this natural way, is just the way he works and who he is. I mean, he always is consulting with Stassi and me and, and inviting us into that collective conversation. And, you know, as we discern where God is calling the church into, into the future. So, it, as counselors, it, you know, not only are we relieving him of other administrative functions and we're taking those on, but we are very much a part of that space of discerning and reflecting on, on the nature of the church. My role, as, as, in the Presidency as that Chief Operating Officer is really to deal with, as you indicated, dealing with the mission and the operation of the church out into the multiple fields. In addition to that, I actually support and work with several IHQ teams. So, the Communications, Electronic Media and Translations Team, which we have are integrated into one team now. I work and support the Formation Ministries Team, the Human Resource Ministries Team, and the International Support Services Team. And as a member of the Presidency, I also serve on the Board of Directors for Outreach International and a World Accord as affiliates of Community of Christ. And then I also serve as the Presidency advocate for several of the

world church teams, Diversity and Inclusion, Human Rights, and the Ecumenical and Interfaith Team. In between all of that as, as you know, and, so well, there's just a number of other functions dealing with the day in and day out operations of the church, you know, policy development, interpretation, sacrament guidelines, communications to the church, Herald review, and lots and lots of meetings. So, that, that's on the Presidency side. And, and again, as you indicated, my integrated part of my Director of Field Ministries is really, again, that responsibility for the mission expansion and administrative functions of the church in over 50 nations where the presence of the church is located. So, the, the real value of that role really is the privilege of working with the Council of Twelve. As, as you know, we work in and make decisions together about apostolic assignments, making, managing the parts of the, the worldwide mission budget that supports mission in the field, working with the Apostles on staffing decisions and deployment, and really, ultimately about the mission strategies and addressing the the needs of the church. But I would say that my most important role as Director of Field Ministries is to support each member of the Council of Twelve in the best way I can in their call and responsibility to lead the mission of the church into their field, along with the local leaders and members. And so that, that, ultimately, is, is what I attempt to do in that role as Director of Field Ministries.

Linda Booth 05:21

And from my own experience working and serving with you, Scott, you do that part very well. So, thank you. (Well, thank you.) As the Director of Field Ministries, you probably have the best global view of what's happening in mission centers and congregations around the world, especially during the pandemic. Many of our Coffee Buzz listeners live in more Western nations, and have experienced the unique challenges COVID has created for members and their families, and for pastors and congregations. And they have personally experienced those challenges and learn how to provide pastoral care in the midst of separation and how to worship and be a congregation online. However, many of us may not realize how the pandemic has impacted Community of Christ ministries internationally. I have a lot of questions about the pandemic's impact on International Church life. And I guess my first question has to do with the places and people where the vaccine isn't readily available. Occasionally, I read emails asking us for prayers for some of our church leaders who have had COVID, or have died from COVID. Please share with us a report on our ministers, health and well being as well as their families.

Scott Murphy 07:12

Linda, I really appreciate you raising this question because I think it's important for our listeners to, to be mindful of what, what's occurring beyond the context in primarily of the US or the Western nations that we're a part of. You know, the simple answer is, it's been hard. Even this week, I, I have communicated with, with a couple of our leaders in India and Nepal, just, just kind of checking in with them because of the heavy burden that they have experienced. And my heart has been heavy for several months as I, as I hear the stories and communicate with the local leaders and, and I, I understand and I get it, that it's, it's easy to lose perspective on what's happening in other parts of the world when, when so much of our news and the stories that we hear is so much about in the context of where we are actually living. You know, so we hear those stories of how, how well things are and how much better things are becoming in the US and you know, in the Western nations, you know, how easy it has been for people who choose to be vaccinated to have access to, to the vaccines, you know, how fortunate we are to have the quality of health care systems that we do and, and yet if you, if you kind of

peek around the corner or take time to, you know, look in other ways, you begin to recognize that beyond our personal experience, there's still a lot of devastation taking place among our members and leaders in other nations, you know, so here's some examples of, of what's been experienced. So I'm sure that through the news, you know, a lot of our listeners have been aware of what's happened in India. So, India has really gotten a lot of attention and rightly so because of what's been happening. You know, in the early stages, many of our leaders had to go into lockdown in, in that early part of the pandemic, you know, primarily in the larger cities where the virus was really rampant. And yet, many of our congregations, as you know, in some of those nations are, are out in the villages in, in the jungle. So, even when I've traveled in India, it would take hours to travel out to the villages to where the church and congregations were located. You know, so in locations like this, life has continued in many ways as it always has. But the more recent surge in India has really been devastating and our local leaders have faced great challenges. They've been in lockdown and not allowed to travel at all. And while the daily infection rates, you know, reported have been in the hundreds of thousands, our leaders and members have been living in the midst of that, and I, I can honestly say, there has been fear. They have, they have simply asked for prayers in that fear of what it means for them, their families, their, their, the people in the members of the church, and just their communities. As they, as they heard the reports of just the rampant infection rates and the rampant deaths that were happening. And the images that they were seeing that food was limited, access to vaccine was almost impossible, you know, family members were dying from COVID. And, and the internal systems just could not even keep up with, with honoring the essence of life and their funeral processes. And this, it was a heavy burden going on. Receiving and communicating with one of our leaders in Nepal, they were sharing about their families and the families contracting the virus and the members dying. One of our leaders talked about their mother having contracted the virus and was very sick and, and trying to find a place in a hospital to take the mother. And the only available space that there was for the mother was, was on a bed lying among other people who had died. And were just laying there because there just was not the personnel to keep up with, with the impact and the loss of life. And the decision of the leader was to finally bring their mother home, where she passed away. You know, so when you hear those kind of stories and, and the impact, and it's not to, it's not to diminish what we've experienced in, you know, in the US or Canada, any other nation, but it is to recognize and if, you know, like yourself, if you've traveled in those nations, you just know that the infrastructure of health care and all of that doesn't even begin to come close to what we are privileged to have in, in the US and Canada and the Western nations. And so it's just this heavy burden, knowing that what our, what our members and leaders are facing out there and feeling helpless in that regard. And we know now, if anyone's been keeping up on the news, while Haiti was doing well there for a long time, they are now surging in, in the virus as it has hit and, and again, getting reports from Apostle Art Smith, who, who serves that part of the field, again, been notified that we've had at least one pastor at this moment who has died, and several members who have passed away because of the impact. So, you know, fortunately, in, in nations, in some nations in Africa and Europe, French Polynesia, things are actually getting better. And yet, in the midst of all of this the church, the people keep offering ministry where they are in trying to do it in the, in the best way they can. So, you know, I would want our listeners to know that it means a lot, it, it is so powerful for those lives and those leaders and those members living and serving the nations where the virus is still prominent to know that they are being held in prayer by, by other members of the church around the world who are a part of Community of Christ. So, I would just want listeners to, to remember that while things are improving for us, there's still a strong need for that prayerful support for other

members of part of the Community of Christ and other nations and would just invite people to continue to uphold those individuals and members in our, in their prayers.

Linda Booth 14:36

Thank you, Scott, for that reminder and I will join with Coffee Buzz listeners to pray and continue my prayers for my sisters and brothers (Yeah.) in those faraway places. (Thank you.) And, and in so many of those countries where the church has really large congregations such as in Haiti and India, Central America and Africa, there's unstable or no Internet connection. So, groups can't meet online, if there is issues with COVID outbreaks. And many of our members in those places, they don't have computers, or Internet in their homes, have these, you said some of the congregations have been meeting. And if they can't meet together, they really don't have a benefit of technology, do they, Scott?

Scott Murphy 15:29

Well, no, they don't. And there are some places in the world and again, where we have the church that, that, that's just not even an option. But I, I think, and Linda, you know this so well, and, you know, and maybe some of our listeners who have traveled, you know, internationally and seen, you know, when you get out into some of these nations and out into those villages, it doesn't take you long to realize how, how different life is. You know, in, in many ways, you know, we need to acknowledge that in some of these nations, and where the church is located out in these villages, people have been dealing with health concerns for generations and generations. I mean, so we talk about the pandemic, they live with epidemics, all the time, epidemics, you know, like Ebola, yellow fever, typhoid, you know, that list could go on.

Linda Booth 16:30

Malaria, malaria.

Scott Murphy 16:31

Malaria, absolutely. So those are, those are the norms of life that, that they live with and the conditions that they live with in these villages. And, and, so, it's not uncommon for normal patterns of life to continue in these kind of conditions, merely out of survival. And, so, in many ways, it has been no different in these nations with the pandemic while people try to be safe and careful, the only way for them to be together is to come in together in community. The whole nature of tribal understanding in, in villages, is that survival only occurs in community and being together. So, it's different in those contexts. And, so, in those places, being the church and being together, as the church has continued, you know, and, again, would remind the listeners that we never said, People you couldn't meet together. We just advised that where possible not to do that. And yet, we understand that in places in the world, being together that way, is the only way that to survive. So, that, in some ways, that's how that's occurred. But in in many nations, where the church is present, um, you know, there have been periods over the last 16 months where governments have required lockdown. So, in India, in many places in India, there has been that lockdown, and our, our leaders and ministers have not been able to travel and, and to be out there. So, they've done the best they can through cell phones. You know, probably not using in the same way of people having their own computers and connecting them that in and yet, one of the benefits is, is that the advancement of cell phone technology has, has been a real blessing. And, so, they've been able to keep in touch with people in those ways. And, so, that's, that

really has been a, a benefit. We have also, you know, recognized that there, there is, in those places with our leaders, exactly, we have been able to communicate with them. You know, most our leaders live in more metropolitan areas where, you know, where there is the Internet and the infrastructure for technology. And so being able to communicate with them has occurred, and there are places in, in Africa and, and some other nations where technology has been used to connect with, with people and I'll, I'll share here in a moment in one of those experiences, but, so, that is occurring. So, really, when you step back and look at this, there is, there's this balance of really, people really further out into the villages where they don't have the benefit of technology they have been meeting together, but where technology is available, they've attempted to use that in the best way they can. And there's really been some wonderful and powerful stories that have, have come out of that. And, you know, we fully expect that as more westernized nations and online ministries and gatherings continue, yeah, that will con, that will continue to be an important part of the, the ongoing operation and mission and formation occurring in, in the life of the church going forward in the future.

Linda Booth 20:22

Yeah, I remember when I served on the Council of Twelve, I was always traveling, you know, weekends and weeks at a time to go out and teach and preach and mentor, mentor leaders and members. Well, I know the pandemic has curtailed travel in more Western nations. And you've already explained that internationally, it has had some impact, but maybe not so much as in Western nations. So, how are Apostles and mission center leaders providing leadership, when they've been hampered by an inability to travel to be with the people that they serve?

Scott Murphy 21:01

I can answer that question in one word, Zoom. What a, what a tremendous tool for the, for us. And, you know, fortunately, again, as indicated, where many of our local mission center, you know, leaders and staff live, both domestically and internationally, they've, they've had that access to technology. And so Apostles have used that frequently and, you know, I've participated, I've been online with Apostles and other leaders and other fields. You know, leadership development is, is still occurring, that, you know, Apostles have, you know, Bunda Chibwe, you know, living here in the US is, is constantly online with, with his leaders out in the field in Africa and India and that, and again, I've seen some of that, and Presidents of Seventy, President of Seventy Larry McGuire, who also supports the Seventy in India and in the, the African nations is constantly online and interfacing. So, you know, it while it's not there in person, and at the same time, what we have found is, you know, leadership development, addressing, you know, just issues in the field, working together as teams has continued in a very consistent and valuable way. And so that really has been a benefit, and there's been good things taking place. You know, for the world church, you know, we, we use two primary platforms. So, Zoom, when we really have large groups, and Microsoft Teams is, is a, is a tool that we use more in the IHQ operations. And, you know, our Presidency meetings are all done on Teams and, and things like that. In Africa, they use the WhatsApp, as really their platform. So, I'm constantly giving, you know, videos or connections. I, I work a lot with, with Bunda or Catherine Mambwe through WhatsApp versus Zoom or Teams just because it, it works well within the infrastructure that they have there. You know, as for travel, you know, we never established a strict travel ban on our World Church Leadership Council members primarily because I, I know and as you, as you can remember, I mean, they're just situations at times that come up that, that could require an Apostle to have to travel and address issues that,

unfortunately, could only be addressed in person. But there, you know, as we worked with the Leadership Council, and primarily the Council of Twelve, there was a strong understanding and recommendation that travel not occur for the safety of church members, the Apostles and their families, and just people in the community. So in the past 16 months, there has only been two times when an Apostle had to travel. And as I worked with them, there were very careful processes of protocols put into place for their own welfare and protection and the protection of other people. So, that, that has been the case. But in, yet at the same time, as I indicated, they have done really a, a wonderful job. You know, in many ways over the past 16 months, it's been my observation that the church has really experienced, in many ways, more ministry from members of the World Church Leadership Council than, than in the past. You know, I was just talking to Catherine Mambwe the other day, and I, I just had recently learned that she had been doing some, some online sharing and ministry, some preaching ministry with several mission centers in the US, especially out on the West Coast. And I just thought, How wonderful. You know, again, the chance of her doing that living in Africa would be so minimal, but now she's had the opportunity to do that on different occasions, you know, you know, President, you know, Veazey. And, you know, Stassi and I have talked a number of times that, that we have participated in actual congregational ministries in the past 16 months in a way, at added a level that we would have never been able to achieve in, in the, prior to the pandemic. And we have church members connecting with each other from multiple places in the world. I never am surprised anymore, when I'm sharing in ministry with a congregation and I discover there's people joining that from, from, you know, other places in, in, you know, the US or across nations, and it, it, at first, it would just throw me off, but not anymore, because that is just become the norm now. And, and so it's really exciting to, to see how these changes, while never anticipated and, and never would we want to be in this pandemic, and, and yet, at the same time, there's been this wonderful blessing to see how the church has adapted to this need to change and what these new experiences have offered for the future and development of the church.

Linda Booth 26:34

Absolutely. I was reading an excerpt from Scientific America, which is a scientific magazine, of different reports, and they were reporting about how mental health in particular, United States over the last two years has really taken a nosedive in particular groups of people, youth, etc., etc. And it said, the only group whose mental health went more positive, was those who were attending church every Sunday, whether it was virtually or in person. (Yeah.) So, I mean, that's kind of what we're talking about, is even in the midst of this horrible pandemic that has caused sorrow and anguish and fear and isolation, the wonders of technology have, and the power of the Holy Spirit using those technologies, has really brought to light some new ways of being together and supporting one another, which is quite phenomenal.

Scott Murphy 27:40

Exactly, and it, you know, we talk about the, the effects of Zoom and, and Zoom fatigue in meetings. And, and I get that, and we know that, that, that's a real physical and mental impact that occurs. And yet, at the same time, when technology is used to really engage in relationship, I mean, just, just sitting here engaging and, and seeing you and, and having conversation, I don't feel that overwhelming at all. It's just for me, it's just a blessing just to have a moment of opportunity to see you and, and be with you

and to, you know, to know that there's, there's listeners out there that will have a chance to, to, to hear us, you know, talking and sharing together so, that, it's good stuff.

Linda Booth 28:32

It is good stuff. Well, we've talked about health and well being of our leaders. We've talked a bit about travel and technology challenges. Are there any other challenges that we haven't yet talked about that you've been observing?

Scott Murphy 28:46

Yeah, so, let me name a couple. So, I, I feel one, I want to name this because I think this is really important. As, as we, as we try to be mindful of, of what the impact of this pandemic has caused for many people. But in this case, I want to acknowledge the impact that the, the pandemic has, has caused on those who serve as ministry leaders, pastors, mission center officers, youth leaders, and again, the list could go on. Well, everyone has experienced stress, anxiety, frustration, fear, and uncertainty and, and, at times, even the joys of being connected, all in the midst of what has occurred during this pandemic. There's, there's something that has also occurred in those who have served in the ministry leadership positions as they have experienced at deeper levels that stress and anxiety, that frustration and the weariness as, as they've had to work to keep, you know, try to keep members connected. As they, as they work at trying to respond to the array of pastoral care needs with, within the limitations that they, they've experienced, learning, just actually learning new ways of connecting the congregation or mission center or children and youth or priesthood through technology. And we, we know that technology comes a whole lot easier for younger generations, and not as easy for those in the older generations. You know, so learning new ways of being together and this technology and developing and offering worship experiences has taken a toll. It was interesting, the other day, I was reading an article out of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership, it's a bi-monthly newsletter that I receive, and the, and the main article in that lose, newsletter was entitled, Acknowledging the Toll of the Pandemic on Ministry Leaders. And so I, I share this because I feel it's important for our members to be mindful of, and to consider how pastoral care ministry might be offered and can be encouraged and extended to our ministry leaders in the local context. So, for you listeners, if you have not done so, maybe you want to reach out to your pastor or mission center leader or the youth leader and encourage them to take time this summer to care for their own spiritual health and well being. You know, it's important for all of us to be able to support those leaders who offer so much for the welfare of the body and community, that we want to encourage them to take care of their own physical, mental, and spiritual well being. So, I, I think that that's one aspect of this pandemic that we also need to be, be mindful of. You know, the other thing that I would just name real quick here, Linda, is, as there has been absolutely wonderful experiences that have emerged through this pandemic, even in the midst of the, the burdens and the stresses, and, and all of that, that I just, you know, acknowledged. You know, there are challenges of coming out of what we have learned through this pandemic and how the church can continue to live and grow through the formation of online ministries. So, as, as the Presidency, we are beginning to explore what it looks like when you have a community or an emerging congregation forming online with people who are coming and forming that, that congregation from different places around the world. And so, again, out of your past experience, when, when you think about, you know, how, how do we, how does that all began to work within our current administrative processes? And, and within our bylaws. You know, does an, does an online community or congregation become a part of

a mission center? And if you have people from multiple places, how do you make a decision on where an online community is, is aligned with a mission center? Or do we need to think about some other organizational structure that needs to be formed to support online communities? How does this work with the way that we select World Conference delegates or delegates for mission center conferences? You know, now that we've experienced that we can connect online, there is a lot of conversation taking place on what this means for future World Conferences. And what that, what that means in terms of how we account for the vast spread of timezones that makes up the church? How do we, how do we vote in a situation like that? So there are, there's a lot of questions that are emerging out of this, this pandemic time and what we've experienced that will, that will continue to challenge us. I would also want the listeners to know that it's changing the way we operate and function and as an example, we've just made the decision as a World Church Leadership Council, we are looking at only meeting in person once a year. Once, once that pandemic ends and we feel it's safe for people to travel, we're going to only meet in person once a year and the other times when we meet, normally, you know, again, we meet three times a year for a week of time and the Council of Twelve meetings. But those other times we will do it online. (Yeah.) You know the recommendation has, has a huge impact on financial, but the most important impact and reason for making that change is our, our decision to try to reduce our carbon footprint and reduce the amount of air travel required to do that. So, we've learned that we can operate online and be together and so why not continue to use that as a format for how we, how we work and operate and how we support the, the ecosystem of, of, of our environment. So those are some things that have been coming up and, and some of the other challenges that, that we're experiencing through this pandemic.

Linda Booth 35:43

Fascinating, Scott. And I'm thankful that those questions are popping up. Because, like you, I believe they really are leading us into a future of different ways in which we, which we can connect and be church. So that's very exciting. Despite all of these challenges, I know that the Holy Spirit is providing opportunities for mission to go forward. I've even been hearing mission stories from people. For example, a few Sundays ago, I was a Zoom preaching with the Florida Mission Center in the United States of America. And that evening, I received an email from a man who insist, had insisted before the service began, that the closed caption option be a part of that Zoom service. And the people were having trouble getting it on there and he said, No, no, please keep trying. Finally, they succeeded. And he shared that evening why he wanted that closed caption on. He had, by chance, met a homeless deaf man named Raphael. And this church member was able to communicate with Raphael because he had taken sign language when he was in university. And when the weather turned cold in sunny Cali, Florida, in Florida, the church member was persistent and he searched the streets trying to find Raphael. And he finally found him. He invited him to quarantine in his home. And to make a long story short, after the quarantine and COVID testing, he was invited to be part of the man's family. And Raphael's life is being transformed. He's very interested in the church and some exciting things are happening in that congregation as a result of it. So, I know the Holy Spirit and members are sharing in Christ's mission despite the pandemic challenges. And I bet you hear lots of stories about, uh, what we used to call mission moments in World Church Leadership Council. So, can you share some of those mission moments with us?

Scott Murphy 37:42

Yeah, I would love to. It, over the past couple of months the, the Presidency has actually been meeting with each in deposit, each individual Apostle and, and spending time just in conversation about mission. You know, I, I just simply called it mission conversation with the Apostle. And again, it's in the midst of that, that we just hear these wonderful stories. So let me give a brief snapshot of some of the things that, you know, we heard and things that are happening. You know, the church in French Polynesia, as you know, Linda, has had such a wonderful presence in the local context. And, and Community of Christ is well respected and valued in that a pop, culture. So, Apostle Mareva Arnaud Tchong was sharing with us that, that over this past year, the church was asked to provide weekly televised worship services that, that go out to the islands. So, every Sunday for the past year, a Community of Christ member, minister and members have been providing ministry, worship, preaching on TV for those who seek to hear the good news of the gospel. And so, you know, what a wonderful ministry and expression of how Community of Christ is being appreciated and making a difference there in, in French Polynesia. Just recently, in some conversations with, with Apostle Bunda Chibwe, you know, he was sharing with me about the continued growth of the church in Angola, which is still one of the new nations that we're in, but they, they were there, they were in, in online doing some leadership development, training and training with priesthood, some new priesthood calls that have, have come as a, as a means of the church being planted in, in that nation. And, and again, just sharing that it just continues to grow. And as it grows, further leadership and, and priesthood needed. He was sharing in, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, that in one worship service in one of the congregations there was, there was 40 people baptized that, that day, and another worship in another part of the mission center in a congregation, 50 people were baptized as part of the worship. I mean, those are exciting. (Wow! Wow!) That's exciting, isn't it? You know, Apostle Catherine Mambwe was sharing with me that, you know, one of the ways that in, in Zambia, Kenya and Malawi, which are three nations as part of her field, they, again, they benefited from the technology. And their youth leader who lives in Zambia has and is, is really good with technology, has been working and has been connecting the youth from Zambia, Kenya and Malawi. They've been bringing them together and, and sharing time together online in worship, in education, you know, fun gatherings. They, they do that through WhatsApp. And so I've had a chance to see some of those videos. You know, in addition, Patrick, who is the youth leader there in Zambia, has also been connecting the youth from that Zambia, Kenya, Malawi group, has also been doing some partnering with youth in Europe as part of this kind of intercultural experience to form community. So, it's, you know, it's exciting and, and, and Richard James has, has been a part of that and Joey Williams. In, in Haiti, we have 61 schools that are sponsored by, by Community of Christ in Outreach International, that reaches 5,500 students each year. Outreach International has been a really active part in working with these schools and, and the staff to manage the school operations. But recently, through really some collaborative efforts that, you know, Art Smith has been working with Andrea Reed, you know, an OI staff, so Community of Christ and OI have come together and we are now sharing two staff members together. And these two staff members serve part time as the mission central financial officers for, for the two mission centers in Haiti and the other half of their time is serving as the school coordinators for these 61 schools that, that Community of Christ supports. I, I share that because I'm really pleased about this kind of collaborative and joint partnership with one of our affiliates, as OI and, and the church support the continued mission in Haiti that touches the lives of thousands of children as a way to impact their lives and hopefully their future. I love this story coming out of one of the mission centers in the US that there was a, there was a member of one of the

congregations in, in the mission center that, who is a truck driver. And, so, benefiting from the local mission center providing online ministries and worship and community gatherings during this pandemic, has, has allowed him to be able to stay connected with his community in a way that was just not feasible before when he was driving truck. But now, as this member is traveling across the US driving truck, he's invited other truckers to join this online experience. And so this mission center, who has made a commitment that even now moving back into in-person gatherings in the congregation, they've said, we still want to be together as a mission center in, in this online ministries. And in when they come together, they have truckers joining them from multiple locations across the US. What a great experience. It's just, again, it's just one of those moments that just remind you of the value of what this brings. You know, there's just so many, you know, other stories, you know, I, I think I'll share one final thing here. This, this, for me, this is so important that Bunda and Catherine were sharing with me not in addition to, you know, these baptisms and what's going on with youth, they were also really excited about the recent notification that they've received from leaders in the field that, that in Malawi, Malawi has raised recently \$1,000 to contribute to the worldwide mission of the church. You know, we know that Malawi's one of the poorest nations in, in the African continent, but out of their own generosity \$1,000. In Kenya, they raised \$2,300. In Nigeria, they raised \$1,000 to, to help support the mission of the church. You know, and, and I share this because, only because I, I want the listeners to know that this is the living example of what the listeners' generosity has done in the lives of those members in these nations. As people share from their heart to support the mission of the church, those who are the recipients of that generosity, and that profound message and mission of the church, have become inspired and blessed. And as a result of that, they now want to share what they have, even as little as that is, to be a part of the global church and its mission. So, that's the power of what people's generous response is doing as it makes it possible for the message and mission of Community of Christ to, you know, to be shared and experienced by people who we may never see face to face, but their lives are better, because of what others have shared. And now what they are sharing for the welfare of others to come. That's powerful. (It is powerful.) And I celebrate that, and, and I'm, I'm so grateful for that opportunity to occur. That's the mission.

Linda Booth 45:48

Oh, I love mission moments, because, and, and, like you said, you're just sharing a few of them. And then there's all those mission moments that you're not even aware of. And, and it's, it's just wonderful how God through the power of the Holy Spirit is, is moving in the midst of this pandemic to change and transform lives. And it's, I mean, I don't know what else to say. It's just truly, truly amazing. (Exactly.) Well, thank you, Scott, for catching us up on the challenges faced by our sisters and brothers in faraway places. As you were talking, I was reminded of inspired Council, I think it's in Section 162, where it says not to be discouraged, that you've never been promised an easy path, but you be assured that the Spirit that calls you will also accompany you. And that's (Exactly.) really what you've been sharing is that, even in the midst of those challenges, that the Spirit still calls us and still accompanies us in Christ's mission. And your mission moments have certainly confirmed the Spirit is calling people and accompanying them to embody the concerns and passion of Christ and then to live Christ's mission. And I want to remind our listeners to be prayerful for leaders. And I want to remind our membership to reach out to their local leaders, to share their appreciation and thanks and their prayers for them. And also, please prayer, pray for our World Church leaders who are learning, through the power of the Holy Spirit, what the church is going to look like as we move forward. So, Scott, do you

think that the church or the congregational mission will go back to what it was before the pandemic? I don't think so. But you've been describing a new path into the future for mission around the world? Right?

Scott Murphy 47:46

Yeah, you know, I think the simple answer is, Linda, it will be both. And it needs to be both. I, this is not about in-person versus online. It's, it's about how, how both can bring value in, in ministry to and create new and fresh expressions of the church that, that are emerging and that we want to create space for to emerge. You know, President Veazey, this is something that the Presidency has been spending a lot of time on, and, you know, in a couple weeks, you know, President Veazey will be releasing a message to the church, you know, talking about this, and, you know, really, again, encouraging the church not to just fall back into those patterns. You know, we are not trying to imply that we can give you the right answer because the right answer for any congregation or community can only come from their own time of a prayerful discernment, and open, open conversation. But I, I really feel I can say to the listeners is, is this that online ministry is not going away? It is here and it is going to grow. So, how do we support this and allow it to create new and fresh mission opportunities to reach people who will probably never walk through the doors of a church building? So, I want to encourage our, our listeners and congregations that as we think about the church's mission, and consider what the best method is to support that mission, there, there's an opportunity, an array of opportunity, how we support that. You know, so our mission statement declares we proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love and peace and in our mission initiatives further unpack that vision. You know, so we, we need to ask ourselves if our sole method of living into and delivering that mission is, is about forming loving and Christ-centered communities and if that is only occurring in what we can do on Sunday mornings, then we need to step back and ask how we best use that time to truly create the kind of fresh expression of community that people are yearning for. And so I think that this past 16 months has been a time that has really invited us to be open to those discoveries and new opportunities. And I really hope that, that there will be because I truly believe that what's been encountered in these last 16 months has been a gift of the Holy Spirit seeking to open new ways for the church to emerge, grow, and evolve in fresh ways as we continue to be grounded in our identity, mission, message and beliefs. So, it, it is finding that balance and just supporting the multiple ways that people can and need to be able to come together in that kind of sacred and loving community.

Linda Booth 51:05

Absolutely. It is a gift of the Spirit, Scott. Thanks again for reminding us of that. For after all, it's about the mission of Jesus Christ is what matters most for the journey ahead. (Absolutely.) And thank you Coffee Buzz listeners for joining our conversation. I hope Scott's words have inspired you and reminded you that by the grace of God, you are poised to fulfill God's ultimate vision for the church. And please watch for next month's episode of Coffee Buzz. I'll be having a conversation with President/Prophet Steve Veazey.

Josh Mangelson 51:51

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 are 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. The music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinze.