

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 22nd episode of Coffee Buzz, a podcast conversation with a member of Community of Christ's 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 and Community of Christ and Director of Communications, as well as six years as President of the Council of Twelve. In this Coffee Buzz episode, I'm talking with my friend Steve Veazey, who has served 16 years as Community of Christ Prophet/President, having been ordained at a special World Conference in 2005. Our conversation will be about his life and the experiences that prepared him to serve as the Church's Prophet and President. Having said that, I'm not sure that anything truly prepares a person to lead a faith movement where members live in more than 60 nations, speak scores of languages and experience different cultures. They hold different perspectives and beliefs. But having served 23 years with Steve on the Council of Twelve Apostles and the World Church Leadership Council, I know he's constantly preparing to serve as he intentionally engages in spiritual disciplines to connect him to God. And as he intently listens to people and genuinely cares for the diversity of the people he serves. Welcome, Steve, to this Coffee Buzz conversation about your life, leadership and ministry. We'll start with beginning, the beginning of your life. And I, I know you were raised in a town named Paris with its very own Eiffel Tower. But rather than the international city in France, your roots come from Paris, Tennessee, a more rural town in the southern United States. So, Steve, tell us about your family, maybe your parents, your brother, your grandparents, etc., and what it was like growing up in that small community. And I imagine that growing up there might have taught you something about authentic community.

Steve Veazey 02:55

Well, first of all, thank you for the opportunity to share in this kind of conversation again. I, I appreciate the occasions when we can do that. Yeah, in, in terms of growing up, I guess is the best way to describe it, although it may sound a bit cliché, I was blessed to grow up in a loving, supportive family, typical of the times in which we lived, which specifically would be the 60s and 70s into the early 80s. My mother was a homemaker, very devoted to the well being of my brother and me. My dad worked in inventory management at the Paris manufacturing plant which produced Holley carburetors or copper, carburetors for automobiles. My brother, Randy, was three years ahead of me in age and school and sort of paved the way for me. He excelled academically and I felt some pressure to follow in his footsteps. He became a beloved educator at our local high school in the area. My grandparents on both my father and mother's sides to the family came from rural backgrounds. They were hard workers. I mostly remembered them from their retirement years. They had survived the Great Depression with sacrificial effort and they lived on small farms outside of our hometown. Now my church connection came through my mother's side of the family who were church members through multiple generations. And my mom was a very devoted faithful member who saw to it that we were immersed in the church experience through our local congregation. Paris as a town was also typical of the times. It was a

medium size, county seat, Mid-South community. It was a community that had a sense of closeness through the schools and different community organizations and events and celebrations. It was a community, is a community where our family name was well known. And so there was a sense of belonging and I had a lot of aunts and uncles and cousins. I think the best way to describe my family and town of origin is that I, I, I had a sense of place, a sense of belonging and rootedness and identity. That, that certainly was formative in my life and faith.

Linda Booth 06:26

Yes. I've been to that Paris Community of Christ building where you attended church. And many times I went to Foundry Hill Camp Grounds where you probably went to church camps and reunions or family camps. And I know folks from that mission center, of course, as their own son. Tell us about the people from the congregation or the area who may have impacted your growing up years.

Steve Veazey 06:54

Yeah, that question prompts a lot of memories and I'll need to be selective. My sense of belonging certainly included our local congregation and our church district or association of congregations or branches, as they were called then, and the district was called Tennessee-Kentucky District which was most of Tennessee and, and part of Western Kentucky. So, in general, as a child, I, I distinctly recall just feeling loved and accepted and encouraged by various personalities and, and church leaders. I was blessed to be part of a active youth group. We called it Zion's League then and it was an organized program of growth, group activities, youth ministries, that was led by a devoted young adult couple who were very enthusiastic about the church who kept us involved in all kinds of activities, probably in an attempt to keep us away from other not so good activities during the growing up years. I remember them preparing us very diligently to go on a church history tour. We had to pass a test on church history to get to go on the tour to the various church historic sites. One memory that just pops in my mind is I recall an older gentleman who came to church every Sunday who was very hard of hearing. And it was known that he really wasn't hearing much of what was going on in terms of discussions or preaching, but he was constantly there to be supportive and involved. He always spoke to my brother and I and the other young people. And the image that stands out is during various worship services during the offering he would take a mason jar, one of the glass jars, that was filled with pennies and nickels and dimes, quarters, and he would put the jar in the offering plate and the deacon had to be careful or the weight of that would kind of tip the plate, but there's just something about that generosity that, that devotion from the meager resources of his life. He, he lived in a wood shack down by the river, as they say, but his, his generosity, uh, his commitment continues to inform my sense of stewardship and generosity today. So, I guess I can say the people of the congregation were, were devoted. They were humble. They were very kind and they were living out their faith as, as best they understood it, which had a tremendous impact on me.

Linda Booth 10:30

Yes, absolutely. And having been to Foundry Hill and having done, built campfires down there, I kind of can picture you as a youth around that campfire. And I imagine even at that time, you had a sense of the living Christ in your life. Want to talk about that at that earlier age?

Steve Veazey 10:54

Yeah, it, it was the faith community that introduced me not just intellectually, but emotionally and relationally, to the way of Christ and the experience of the living Christ. In particular, I recall when I was baptized at a little over eight years of age, my brother and I were baptized together. And I remember kind of standing on my tiptoes and looking over the edge of the baptismal font and seeing my extended family, not my biological family, they, they were there, they were part of it. But this group was the extended family. And they, they were all just smiling and kind of leaning forward to see the baptism. And, and I recall this distinct sense of love that I now understand as grace as the gift of the community and Christ of acceptance and encouragement. But in my young mind, I remember thinking that as the people were smiling, that Jesus was smiling through them. And I don't know how that thought came into my mind, but it stuck all these years and I felt a closeness, a, a relationship. Another time I remember something happened during our, one of our youth meetings, where we were playing dodgeball in the basement of the church. And somehow, in our enthusiasm, the game spilled out and we made our way up the stairs and into the sanctuary. And in the course of that, I threw a ball that missed my intended mark and it broke out one of the beautiful, the pain of stained glass window that was a very large, very large arch. It was one of the distinctive characteristics of that sanctuary. It broke it and I was terrified. I was terrified of how others would, would react. I, I thought I was in big trouble. I kind of drew into myself. And it's all a bit of a blur, but what I recall is there never was any chastisement. There, there weren't any ramifications in terms of punishment or reactions that, that were hurtful to me. So, I think it was the mindset of the congregation that having the youth in church, and in the church building, ultimately was the most important thing. Even in relation to stained glass windows which were held somewhat sacred. Now, they never could find a pane of glass that exactly matched the rest of the window in color, so for a while, every Sunday, I went to church and saw that pane of glass that was kind of odd. At first it, it was embarrassing to relive the experience. And then later on, it became a symbol to me of grace and love. And things fitting in even when they're broken. Yeah, that experience has stayed with me.

Linda Booth 14:43

That is marvelous. You know, as you were talking about that community, that authentic community that you were raised, and for some reason it gave me the image of the way in which people treat each other in French Polynesia where (Yeah.) every, every child is their child and every mom or dad is their mom or dad. (Yeah.) And while you might not have viewed it in that way, it has that same sense of authentic community.

Steve Veazey 15:10

Yes, it does. And it's, it's part of the larger community of the hometown because the church members were part of that community and I interacted with them and met them in various other activities and the sense of community remained. It wasn't just in the church or when we were in church. (Yes.) It was part of, of an, an experience of community that the church was instrumental in shaping, but it also spilled over into the larger community. And that's not to say it was perfect and there weren't conflicts and problems. But, yeah, foundationally that's what shaped me.

Linda Booth 16:00

Yes, it does. Marvelous. And, and I know when I, when people always ask when I would travel in the South, especially in that area, they would ask how you were doing like you were their son. And, and

oftentimes they would talk, uh, talk about this, even as a child and, uh, as a teenager, they had this sense that you had, you're very serious minded, and that you had a connection, a spiritual connection to God. And I don't know, in those times, they called young men to the priesthood in Community of Christ. Were you called to the priesthood when you were in your teenage years, or when were you called to the priesthood?

Steve Veazey 16:39

Yeah. I was. And when I was 16, I was called to be a deacon. My brother was called to be a priest. And I, I recall those experiences of calling and, and preparation and ordination as part of my formation. I, I recall that part of the expectation in those days was, Okay, there's basic duties, but what priesthood really do is they preach. So, the pastor thought my, my brother and I, given our relatively young age and inexperience, weren't ready to, as they said in those days, occupy the hour, individually. So, he assigned us together to a Sunday night to preach. Randy got to go first. And then I was to follow. And the pastor thought, well, together, we could probably put together a message that would meet the expectations of the congregation. Well, my brother went first and then he was a student. He, he brought us a stack of books to the pulpit. And he spoke for like 50 minutes. He covered creation all the way through Jesus Christ to Revelation, book of Revelation. And then he, he concluded, and I remember when I got up, the people were looking somewhat anxious. And that's when, that's when I made a compassionate decision. I discerned the situation and I said just a few short comments and affirmed what my brother had said and, and concluded. I remember afterwards, I received a lot of grateful handshakes. After that we were never assigned together again.

Linda Booth 19:01

I've heard a little bit about your high school years. I remember you talking about I think, playing football and track. And I'm, like I said, I assume you're a pretty good student because you went to college or university, and I believe you earned a degree that focused on the environment, or nature conservation or something. Am I close?

Steve Veazey 19:22

Yeah, on all of that. I, I played football for my high school team. And I ran track. My primary event was the low, low hurdles, because I couldn't get over the high hurdles, so I ran the low hurdles, and various other events that I, I participated in. I went to college on scholarship, and pretty, pretty much all of my college was paid for through scholarships that I received. And my bachelor's degree is in Natural Resources Management with a major in wildlife biology from the University of Tennessee. The campus I went to is in Martin, Tennessee, which is about an hour away from where I grew up.

Linda Booth 20:20

Yes. And so did you work in that field, Steve?

Steve Veazey 20:24

Well, that's an interesting part of my story after all of that, actually, no. I, I worked the summer following my senior year in high school, when I was headed to college, I worked on the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge, and was preparing to pursue an internship or career with a state or national wildlife agency. But before, after I graduated from college, so I had an interest in that field, and had worked one

summer before I started college in that field. But after I graduated, the World Church invited me to give a couple of years of my life and be a sign to some other part of the church as a, as a young adult and be involved in youth ministry and missionary ministry, outreach ministry. It was a whole variety of experiences. So, I did that. And as they say, way, lead on to way and I never went back. So, they, my life took a turn towards a career in full time ministry.

Linda Booth 21:45

So who was it? Who was it that identified your giftedness and your ministry and leadership potential? Was it an apostle or

Steve Veazey 21:56

It was what we then called regional administrators. His name was Larry Childers. (Yes.) You may know him. (Yes.) He was a regional administrator in our area. And he, for whatever reason, talked to me about this new program and that they were looking for some people to kind of be the pilot group. And with my experience in various roles, he wanted to know if I was interested, and I kind of said, Sure, if I can be of service. And so he made initial contact and then there was contact from the World Church to begin a process of exploration, whether that was a good fit.

Linda Booth 22:50

Yes. Well, you must have been quite young when you started working for the church, because, and you don't remember this, maybe, but I still remember a sermon you gave at the Olathe Congregation, which is in Kansas, in the United States. I believe it was in the late 1970s. And I was a young mother of three sons and you were an even younger minister. And you told the biblical story of Lazarus. And I will never forget you repeating the words Jesus says to Lazarus friends, Unbind him and let him go. And you told the congregation that we were to unbind our friends, our family, our neighbors, who were restrained by sin or life circumstances, and who needed to be restored to right relationship with God and others. And I can't recall many sermons back then, but I vividly remember yours. And you were already calling people to Christ's mission. So you came a long way from that first sermon. Because it was a very heartfelt, passionate sermon that called us to Christ's mission. So you started working for the church. And so then just, you said then, when, when, when and where, where did your assignments then lead you?

Steve Veazey 24:14

First of all, I'm amazed that you remember a sermon back then, but, and the particular phrase. I like that. I may use that again. (That's a good one.) I actually started working for the church full time in, in 1979, which is the year I graduated from college. I was a single, young adult. And I was assigned to the Pacific Northwest Region and that was my first big adventure outside of the Mid-South. I lived in Portland, Oregon. I traveled throughout Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and British Columbia, Canada, and I was a youth and outreach minister. When that concluded, those were contractual positions for a certain period of time, I was employed in the San Francisco Bay Stake as a missionary outreach minister responsible for growing a congregation in, in Fremont, California. Then I was recruited and employed as a World Church appointee, which, as you know, subjects you to assignment anywhere. And so my first assignment in that category of employment was the North Central Region, USA and Canada. And I lived in Davenport, Iowa, and worked in three districts, including the Nauvoo District,

where I had connection with people primarily who were involved in the outreach ministries of the church. I was supporting them. And then since then, all kinds of other assignments and opportunities to serve.

Linda Booth 26:14

Yes. So that, so they identified you first as a youth minister, because of your age, (Yeah.) but then they must have seen something in you that I saw in that sermon about Christ's mission. So you began to go into that outreach, missionary, evangelism. (Yeah.)

Steve Veazey 26:31

The times, the times in the Pacific Northwest and California were particularly formative. Because I was associated with more, more experienced ministers who had the heart for evangelism and call to discipleship. And they mentored me and encouraged me and involved me with them. And something sparked. Something took hold. And that, that became a significant part of ministry for me was reaching out to those who were seeking, searching, who were receptive and building the relationships and sharing the experiences and invitations that lead them to discipleship.

Linda Booth 27:29

Yeah, I can see, I can see that as a very pivotal direction that, where your life's taking you. I'm very thankful for that, that time for, in your life. Also, sometime around in there, you must have met your wife, Cathy. Now, I know she's been a great supporter and an influence in your life and ministry, and as well as she's an excellent minister in her own right. So, in that time period, is that when you met Cathy?

Steve Veazey 27:59

Yeah, it was when I was living in Davenport, Iowa, as a, as a world church appointee. She was living in Independence. That means there's about six and a half hours of travel between us. We, we met through the encouragement and some orchestration of a couple, who also worked for the church, who were mutual friends. And so they knew me and they knew her, but we didn't know each other. So, the first time they attempted to have us cross paths at their house in Des Moines, Iowa, which was about half way between if you travel the interstates, I missed it. I was late. I was at a youth retreat in western Iowa and I got caught up and we, and I just didn't get away in time to get there. She went on home. But then, through encouragement, we identified another opportunity to meet, but it involved me going to Independence, which I occasionally did. And we did have a occasion to meet and, and had a first date. And then over the course of about a year developed a relationship that, that turned into marriage. And let me say Cathy's certainly been a, a full supporter and encourager for me. I can't imagine bearing the responsibilities that I've been asked to assume without her encouragement, support, insight, and as you said, as well as capably offering her own ministry now as an evangelist in the church and in leadership. So she's had various leadership roles.

Linda Booth 30:06

Yes, yes. And you became an instant father as well.

Steve Veazey 30:10

That's right. She had been married previously, and her first husband had died in a tragic accident. And, and they had had two children. So there were two young children. So I actually married a family.

Linda Booth 30:26

Yes, you did. You did. Well, when were you called and ordained to serve on the Council of Twelve Apostles?

Steve Veazey 30:36

I was called to serve in the Council of Twelve in 1992. And we were living in St. Louis as church appointees assigned to the East Central States Region. And I was about 36 years old at, at the time. And I remember President Smith, Wallace B. Smith, at the time coming to our home and, and presenting the call and encouraging me to respond, which I did. That resulted in a move to Independence near church headquarters where we've lived ever since in the Independence area.

Linda Booth 31:25

Yeah, and so, so just 36 years old, that, that, you're one of the youngest on the Council then at that time?

Steve Veazey 31:33

I, I, I think so. I don't know all the ages. But, yeah, I assume that's the case.

Linda Booth 31:43

Yes. And so then what were your assignments.

Steve Veazey 31:47

I had a range of assignments. Initially, I had a field that included jurisdictions in the United States in the south central area, as well as Ontario, Canada. Plus, I had responsibility for the Temple Missionary Center, associated with the Temple in Independence. And then other assignments over the years included portions of the United States, including time as Apostle to the southern field, which included the area where I had grown up, which was an interesting circle, to have left and then come back as the, as the field apostle to the area. Several of the local folks kiddingly told me that I shouldn't come down there trying to tell them what to do. But that was all in fun and and love. Then for four years, I served as Apostle to the Africa field which was a very formative time in my life as I began to comprehend the global, multi-cultural nature of our church family.

Linda Booth 33:02

Yes. Tell, tell us about some of the experiences in Africa because I will, I've seen, total of my whole career, I was there, maybe six weeks, but you were there a long time and intimate, had a huge impact on my understanding of the world. And (Yes.) our calling in the world. So tell us a little bit about that impact in your life, because I know it had to have been formative.

Steve Veazey 33:27

Yeah, it's very enriching for anyone to get outside of their own culture. And then to look back at oneself and one's culture from that new perspective. And to realize that there are various ways in which to view

life and approach life. And it really brings a richness of perspective to understanding the gospel and the vision of the gospel that the cultures of the world all have gifts to share, in terms of our understanding of the gospel, and gifts to share in terms of the coming forth of the kingdom of God. So it moves you out of any kind of cultural self centeredness or, or arrogance and, and makes you a, a citizen of the world and a member of a world-wide church movement, which I think is important to our understanding of what God's reign of peace in creation is, is all about. In terms of Africa itself, time and time again, I was impacted by people who live close to dire poverty or in crushing poverty who so appreciated and celebrated the hope of the gospel that it was the most precious thing in their lives. And that was critical to my understanding coming out of a part of the world where people are more at times lackadaisical, or, or warm towards the gospel. For these folks gospel, the gospel was life, the church community was life. And it was their hope. And that impressed on me greatly the importance of what we share and how we share it. There were times I was scared. I was in risky situations and I had to resolve in my own life that my faith in Christ would see me through no, no matter what and that I was never totally alone or in any situation where Christ was not present with me. But since that time, that, that opened me up, then to all the cultures of the church and to always be looking for what they have to offer to help our understanding, more holistic understanding of the gospel.

Linda Booth 36:31

Yes, yes, absolutely. So I, I went into the Council of Twelve in 1998. And you all welcomed me and Gail. We were the first two women in, that were ordained to serve in the Council. And, and Alex Kahtava was President of the Council of Twelve at that time. And then when he announced his retirement, I remember a discussion that we had in the Council of Twelve about who should we elect to serve as the Council President. And, of course, you were the one selected by the Council of Twelve to serve. And I guess we should describe that process to Coffee Buzz listeners, and you are the best one to describe that process because you as President of the church participate in that process. So,

Steve Veazey 37:29

Yeah, it's a what I would describe as a prayerful deliberative process. I think it's become more open in recent church history where before individuals prayerfully reflected on who should serve as President of the Council of Twelve and Secretary of the Council of Twelve, the two leadership positions in the Council of Twelve. And then there's, there's a, there are steps where there are nominations so it's open to anyone in the Council. And there's a process of voting by paper ballot so that it's not something that others can see how you're voting. And through that process an individual is selected to serve as President of the Council of Twelve and then as Secretary of the Council of Twelve in support of, of the President. So, what I recall is, is the willingness of the Council to move into more open discussion with everyone around the table rather than it being something that was considered just by individuals.

Linda Booth 38:50

Yes, yes. And so you were selected to serve as President of the Council. And I'm assuming that that role helped to prepare you to serve as Prophet/President because of your interaction then with the First Presidency or members of the First Presidency.

Steve Veazey 39:07

Yeah, I would say very much so. Although, as you said earlier, I don't think there's anything that can fully prepare you for the role of Prophet/President. In some ways, you have to grow into the role as you face challenges, circumstances, opportunities, but I would say the opportunity to interface with the Presidency directly through the role of President of the Council of Twelve, which included director of field ministries throughout the world, provided me exposure to all the kinds of issues, concerns, questions and hopes that are carried in the Presidency in relation to the church's life and mission. So, yeah, that, that that was important.

Linda Booth 39:57

It was important. Of course, then the next step was following the resignation of President Grant Murray, the Council of Twelve was tasked with leading a worldwide discernment process that would result in the Council recommending the name of the person to serve as Prophet/President. And they, that recommendation went to the 2005 World Conference for those delegates' consideration. And so that was a, I don't remember if it was a year long process, but it was a long process where we prayed as a Council, the church prayed, prayed. And we asked people to send in their sense of who was being called to serve. And so members sent in their letters with recommendations, leading quorums of the church sent in their letter of recommendation. And then near the end of that discernment process, the Council of Twelve gathered in a colleague's home and I can re, I remember how we were seated in that little bitty front room. And you read the recommendations from the leading quorums of the church and the church members. And then after you read it and we prayed and had moments of, of intense connection, trying to connect with God's will, then the Council of Twelve members each shared who they believed God was calling to lead the church and your name was shared by each council member. So, what were your thoughts as those testimonies were given? And did you have a sense that you would be the one named to serve as Prophet/President of the church?

Steve Veazey 41:36

Well, it, uh, I have to admit that I probably should have kept a more detailed journal during that time because things were happening and there are a lot of different emotions. And it's a bit fuzzy because as it began to unfold, my mind was racing with all kinds of thoughts and questions and concerns. So, there was an internal process going, going on. My sense of that call as a possibility came primarily as a result of a few colleagues, including my supervisor in the First Presidency, Ken Robinson, who suggested to me that I should begin to prepare myself for that as a possibility. And so I kind of, you know, was thinking about it, but it's just my nature and my personality not to strive for that kind of position or responsibility. I, I try to serve where I'm called to serve, wherever that is. When the group began to name my name, I don't know if you remember or not, but my first response was to suggest that I should now leave the meeting so that people could speak frankly without me present because I was sure that there must be other recommendations or concerns about me stepping into that role. So I thought, what's the appro, proper thing to do, is the appropriate thing to do to excuse myself. So, I was going to leave (No.) and the Council itself, and I especially, I remember especially Jim Slaughter saying, No, you should stay because you need to have the experience and you need to hear the testimonies because you'll need to rely on that in the future as you face these responsibilities. So, I, I remember that. And then when I didn't accept on the spot, I asked for time to reflect and, and pray. When I spoke with Cathy, this was a rather profound moment that I haven't shared very extensively, she wasn't at all surprised. She recounted that she had had a personal experience through which she

became aware of that as a strong possibility before we were married (Oh, my.) and I kind of, Oh, boy. So, my family was supportive and offered encouragement.

Linda Booth 44:45

Yes. Well, I've never shared this to anyone, but when they were reading the names, there was a couple letters that mentioned my name, and I remember thinking, I can't even say what I was thinking. I was panicked. And so, it, because I (Panicked, that's the word.) And, and so when that, my colleagues, because my testimony was it was your name that was in my heart and mind and soul. And when they started sharing your name, I remember thinking, Oh, thank God. I can, I can stop kind of (. . .) a taste of what you've kind of been thinking.

Steve Veazey 45:26

And I was thinking, Oh, my God.

Linda Booth 45:30

Literally, My God. But, but I remember the power of those, the testimonies were not long, but they each one were a little bit different and very confirming. And it was, it was a high point, I believe, in the Council up to that point, at least from my perspective, of how do we discern together, when the church discerns together, when we all focus on something together prayerfully and intentionally, what can happen. (What can happen.) That, that was an amazing, amazing experience.

Steve Veazey 46:08

Yeah. (Yeah.) And I think that has contributed to the church's experience and capacity to discern, as a prophetic people, not just leadership, but in response to very significant and serious issues. That experience was part of helping us develop capacity to discern together as a prophetic people.

Linda Booth 46:36

Yes, it was, it was a powerful, powerful time in the life of the church which has continued to lead us as a body. And so two years later, after your ordination to Prophet/President, you presented inspired counsel to the church, which the 2800 delegates at that 2007 World Conference voted to be included in the Doctrine and Covenants as Section 163. And that section began, or begins with, Community of Christ, your name given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go. So, Steve, if you would tell us about the spiritual process to form the words, that, that still lead the church today. What is that process or that experience of presenting inspired counsel to the church?

Steve Veazey 47:48

I think I would describe it as, first of all, emerging out of an attempt to be open constantly, and to listen carefully for all the ways or any way in which God may be revealing God's nature and, and will and that can come from me through prayerful reflection, spiritual practices. It can come through study. There are times when I'm reading and certain truths just seem to stand out. And they call me into further reflection. I've experienced it as hearing peoples' testimonies, in the voices of the church around the world. And as a person is testifying, there is truth that, again, is amplified or stands out, or there's a

sense, there's a spiritual sense of affirmation and confirmation. And then my own life experience. All of that works together. So, it's, it's not just me. It's the community. And my responsibility is to try to pay attention to how God is revealing God's nature and will in the community, through the community, but also in the larger world. And, and so there's a broad dimension of God's activity that one must pay attention to. And for me, what begins to happen is certain themes or concepts begin to emerge. And then I seek the help of the Spirit to articulate that in ways that does the concept justice, which is very hard sometimes to capture in words. The words of any particular language are limited when you're dealing with eternal spiritual principles and, and, and matters. But I do that trusting that the Holy Spirit that guides me in shaping words will also guide others and inspire them as they reflect on those words. So, it's a dynamic process. It's, it's, it's not a sheet of paper that falls out of the heavens. It's a process of interaction with God and the church that results in inspired counsel, but the heart of it is concepts and themes that emerge. And through the strengthening and illumination of the Holy Spirit, there are certain phrases and ways of expression, expressing, expressing that. And oftentimes, it's more metaphorical. But sometimes it's quite descriptive or even specific. So it's, it's all of that. And then the written account of that is what is presented to the church. And I'm very grateful that the church then engages in reflection on whether that is something that should become established or normative in the life of the church, to be included in the Doctrine and Covenants. In this case, in relation to this particular paragraph, I had been making notes and, and shaping words, and then as I started to try to stitch that together, that phrase, just, just emerged. It surfaced. And so I expressed it as I understood it at the time, and as you've read it, and it continues to be a phrase that, I think, guides the church into the future as, as we seek to live into our name and, and calling.

Linda Booth 52:38

Yes, absolutely. And we can, I could have read multiple parts of the inspired counsel you brought to the church that have helped form me as a minister and disciple of Jesus Christ, and I know have, have helped form countless people throughout the church who read it in multiple languages. So, I'm very thankful for your intentional listening and constantly being open to God's direction as you hear it in and read it in books and hear it in people's voices from people around the church. Has the process to bring additional inspired counsel to the church, has it gotten any easier over the years?

Steve Veazey 53:21

Um, no, it hasn't gotten easier. And that's because, I think, I, I take it so seriously. And it's never become easier because of my concern that what is offered truly is the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I, I would say that in my first experience, um, I, I was looking to colleagues, close colleagues and others to bring some sense of affirmation before I presented it to the church because I hadn't had that experience before. And so my counselors in the Presidency and a few other trusted folks helped me have the confidence to offer it to the church. I'd say that. And now there's a bit more experience in doing that, and that allows me to, to move into those experiences, if they're called for, with a bit more confidence.

Linda Booth 54:36

Yes, yes. So, um, what, what are some of, do you think, are some of the greatest challenges you face or the church faces today?

Steve Veazey 54:50

Well, obviously the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted and now it's continuing to dis, to disrupt many aspects of church life, including our plans for World Conference, which is always an event we look forward to. We continue to struggle with financial constraints to have the resources to pursue our mission and all the opportunities we have before us, and that can be a frustration. All of the cultural ferment and shifting socially, economically, politically that's going on impacts the church in terms of our members' experiences, perspectives, and, and so forth. Um, I'll tell you overall challenge is, is a good one to have. And that is, how do we as a multi-cultural faith movement find ways to make decisions with high levels of consensus that then frees us to move forward in prophetic directions in the world. And that's always a challenge, but it's a necessary challenge. And, and we will continue to experience and experiment with ways to do that together.

Linda Booth 56:20

Yes, yes. And so what is your, I'm going to end with one question, you might have some other things that you want to say, too, in conclusion, but what is your hope for Community of Christ as you continue to lead us as our Prophet/President?

Steve Veazey 56:35

I think my greatest hope is that the church, as it does state in Doctrine and Covenants 163, will truly embrace our name. And live into it as a calling and a purpose and a mission to such a degree that our members and friends, participants in the life of the church, and anyone that our ministries impact or have contact with, will experience Jesus Christ as Jesus Christ truly was and is. And I guess what I'm saying is that people will experience the living Christ in and through the community and that that's where they'll encounter the true personality of Christ, in the community. And for me, that's what it means to say that Community of Christ is our identity. It's our calling, and that's an ongoing calling to become that community.

Linda Booth 57:55

Yes. Well, thank, thank you so much, Steve, for your candid and inspiring stories. And, and I'm, I'm so thankful that you allow God to form you and direct you and, and to lead the church through you. And I'm so thankful for the many unnamed people who impacted your life; for your parents and your brother and the Paris Congregation and community, for your wonderful wife, Cathy, and all the others that have, have brought grace to your life and encouraged you in your ministry and leadership. And I want to thank you Coffee Buzz listeners for joining our conversation. I hope Steve's words have inspired you, too, and reminded you that by the grace of God, we, you are poised to fulfill God's ultimate vision for the church and that God calls you just as God has called Steve. And please watch for next month's episode of Coffee Buzz. I'll be having a conversation with President Stassi Cramm, Counselor to President Steve Veazey and Presiding Bishop of Community of Christ.

Josh Mangelson 59:16

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