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

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Welcome to the 23rd episode of Coffee Buzz. My name is Linda Booth. I host this monthly Project Zion Podcast which is an intimate conversation with a member of Community of Christ First Presidency. I became the host of Coffee Buzz soon after retiring from serving 23 years as an apostle in Community of Christ and director of communication as well as six years as president of the Council of Twelve Apostles. In this Coffee Buzz episode, I'm talking with my dear friend, Stassi Cramm, who serves as a counselor to Prophet/President Steve Veazey and as Community of Christ's Presiding Bishop. I first met Stassi a long time ago when she was interviewing for a full time ministry position. That was like 20 some plus years ago, and Gail Mangle and I were the only women on the Council of Twelve in the World Church Leadership Council at that time. So needless to say, I was very enthusiastic during Stassi's interview, first, because of her outstanding responses to our questions and secondly, because I yearned for more women in full time ministry roles. So, welcome, dear friend. What do you remember about that marathon interview process that brought you into Community of Christ full time ministry?

Stassi Cramm 02:03

Yeah, gosh, Linda, your question brings back just a, you know, a rush of memories. Um, I do remember being pretty intimidated to have multiple interviews over two days with every member of the World Church Leadership Council that happened to be in town. I had no idea what type of questions to expect since I wasn't really applying for a specific position, and was just applying to be an employed full time minister doing whatever the church needed me to do. I also was interviewed at the time when the church was still interviewing spouses as part of the process. And over 20 years ago, my husband, Steve, wasn't a member of the church at that point. So, he was a huge supporter and he was the primary reason I had applied for a position. But I know he was really nervous and so I was really nervous for him. Ironically, I think everyone enjoyed talking to him as much or more than as with me.

Linda Booth 03:02

Yeah, those, those were interesting times. I didn't have to go through that interview process, thankfully. But the fact that you had to talk to every single world church leader who was in town at the time, but must have been very daunting. I also remember when I first began to work for the church in 1997, uh, I had a bit of a culture shock. That's the only way I can describe it. I had been editor for a magazine and then a bi-weekly newspaper. And I had been Director of Communications for one of the largest school districts in Kansas and headed up public relations in the Greater Kansas City area for the University of Kansas. So, I was accustomed to meetings with a lot of different people. However, meetings at Community of Christ International Headquarters in the Temple were different. They often started with prayers. And before coming to work full time for the church, I worked with a lot of good people, but the relationship I had with them, I could just describe it as warm, but professionally distant. But every interaction with Community of Christ employees from the president of the church to the custodian was

very relational. Did, did you experience any culture shock coming from your profession in the Air Force to full time ministry in Community of Christ? And I'm thinking your answer is yes, so tell us about that transition.

Stassi Cramm 04:33

Yeah, in some ways, it's really interesting. There was huge culture shock in certain arenas, and yet in other arenas, there was, I don't know this interesting feeling of familiarity. You already mentioned you and Gail being the only two women leaders at the time on the Leadership Council. Um, of course, coming out of an engineering background, I was used to a very male dominated environment. So that part felt kind of familiar to me. I'm also pretty sure that the pace of how things got accomplished in your previous job was a lot different because being a magazine and a newspaper industry, I, you know, things move really quickly, which as most people know, is not really the case in the church. In that regard, the speed of change was similar between my government job and my church job. So, I'd already developed a level of patience. Uh, in certain scenarios, change feels like it is slower than watching paint dry. But that makes it sound really negative and I don't really think it's a negative thing. It links back to what you were talking about. And that's the importance of relationships and wanting to have significant buy-in and agreement before proceeding. In the government, the compelling desire was to uphold the democratic process and so that drove a lot of the behaviors. In the church, it's related, but it's not just democracy, it's our theocratic democracy. So, we do want to honor each other's perspectives, but we also want to make sure that we're being faithful in following the leadings of the Holy Spirit. So, you know, there was some relationship (. . .) there. As you know, I was a test engineer. And that community is actually a very small and weirdly relational group for a bunch of engineers. Maybe it's because all their life they've been like geeks and they've been on the outside of most communities and so when they all find people that are like them, they really cling together in the good times and the bad. And, so, in that regard, going to work for the church in a full time capacity was like being adopted into a new community and that was a very comforting feeling for me. Like you said, the church is fabulously relational. Sometimes that's for the better, every now and again, that's for the worse, but it's definitely about being in community together.

Linda Booth 06:56

Ab, absolutely. Our, our work environment is, reflects the name of the church Community of Christ just as our congregations do as well. I'm sure thankful you felt called to serve as a minister and a leader in Community of Christ. And on behalf of the church, thank you for responding to God's call. Several months ago, you invited church members to answer survey questions about their giving to local and worldwide mission. And I've read the, the executive summary, which I found insightful and, quite honestly, fascinating. I believe Coffee Buzz listeners would be interested in what the survey responses found and how their answers will impact future decisions and planning. So, let's start with the basics of the survey. So, who was invited to respond, who responded, etc?

Stassi Cramm 07:52

Yeah, so before I jump into the survey, I just want to say thank you for your thank you. And I, I just want the podcast listeners to know how privileged I feel to have the opportunity to support them and the church and to serve God in this way. So, at this moment in my life, I really can't imagine being in any other place. So, I just, I wanted to acknowledge that. So, you mentioned the survey. And we're very

excited about the survey and, um, and I'm, I'm glad to have a chance to talk about it a little bit. We're still trying to make sense of it. The survey was announced on the 22nd of April, so it's been several months. We emailed the survey link to more than 15,000 individuals, primarily focused on the United States. But the link was also released through social media. The purpose of the survey was to seek a better understanding of the attitudes and motivations of members and friends in the United States on a variety of topics related to funding local and worldwide mission. Now, we're also interested in members and friends thoughts in other countries. But because processes are different in each country, we concluded that how we collect that information and have those conversations needs to be different in different cultural contexts. So, I want to thank all of those who are listening to the podcast who completed the survey. And I want to emphasize how much we sincerely appreciate and a value, and value all of the inputs that we got. We had just under 4000 individuals in the United States complete the survey with participants from 48 of the 50 states and 37 out of 38 mission centers represented. We also had 95 surveys completed through social media from individuals outside the USA. So, that'll give us insights as we start to collect information in other countries. Fifty-eight percent of the survey participants were women. So, um, you know, so it wasn't quite half and half. Uh, and we had an, kind of an interesting breakdown of ages. We had 5% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 34, 18% were between ages 35 and 54, 53% were between ages 55 and 74, so that was the biggest group, and then 24% were 75 and older, which I think speaks really highly of how active and healthy people are in Community of Christ that we had, you know, so many responding who were over 75. Ninety-seven percent of the survey participants were Community of Christ members and 68% were priesthood members. Now, that's not a huge surprise, because this survey was targeted to those who are actively contributing and those who are in key leadership positions or have been in key litter, leadership positions. A total of 50% of survey respondents were either past or current leaders in their congregations or mission center. So, that kind of, you know, lifts up what I was talking about as far as the focus being on leaders and contributors. So, that's kind of a brief, little bit on the demographics,

Linda Booth 11:24

That's helpful background. And, so, from that survey report, you mentioned a little that you weren't surprised or a little surprised. What, what, were there any other surprises?

Stassi Cramm 11:35

Yeah, so, um, in some ways, the actual response was a surprise in and of itself. We had no sooner sent out the link in the emails and the responses just started pouring in. Um, the consultants, because we were using a consulting firm who specializes in this type of survey work, and they were convinced that we were going to get miniscule response. And they thought we were crazy that we could send out a single email and do a single social media release and get any type of significant response. So, they were quite blown away at not only the number of responses, but the quality of the responses. Our team kept telling the consultants that people are passionate about the church's mission and how we support it. So, we knew that people would want to share, that we really value the voice of each one. And so I was so proud to be part of Community of Christ and to witness how everyone responded. It, it just, it felt really good. As for surprises in the actual feedback, for the most part, responses were somewhat aligned with what we anticipated because, as you can imagine, as we wrote questions, we sort of guessed at what we thought responses might look like. However, it's always good to have your assumptions verified and to not just rely on what you think, you know. So, getting the results was very,

very important. There is still a small contingent of people who feel that the church is not communicating enough about finances and how worldwide mission tithes are used. I'd like to say that that was a surprise. But you, since you were in communications, you know how hard it is to communicate and you know how hard we try to get the word out. So, I wasn't completely surprised that there was still some level of frustration, but, you know, it was important to have that confirmed. That same group, group also expressed a lack of trust in leadership and concerns about the direction of the church. This was nowhere near the majority of responses, but I want people to know that we read every response and are considering each one. We are not simply looking for responses that confirmed preconceived ideas. There were a few that were hard to read because, honestly, I take that feedback very personally and especially feedback about the lack of financial transparency and lack of trust related to financial management because in my role as Presiding Bishop, those are really important topics for me. And, so, I'm, I'm, you know, sad, I guess, and concerned that there are some who still feel like we are not living up to their expectations. And, so, that just continues to challenge us as we try to do better. As far as the best way to fund business and support services in the future, there was no single standout recommendation. People had a variety of perspectives, and there did not appear to be a strong consensus for pushing with a particular solution.

Linda Booth 14:59

Stassi, you mentioned, uh, ways to fund business and support services. Could you define what those are for Coffee Buzz listeners?

Stassi Cramm 15:09

Yeah, yeah, no, I'm glad. You know how you start to use buzzwords and you forget, you know, that everybody doesn't know what you're talking about. So, these two, uh, words, uh, business services and support services, refer to two sections identified in the worldwide mission budget. So, if people go look online at the budget and look down at the details, they will see these two sections. Business Services includes things like fiscal services, risk management, and legal services. And Support Services includes things like membership, archives, and records management, human resources support, mission funding, and information technology.

Linda Booth 15:52

That's, that's helpful. Thank you very much. How do you think the survey responses will impact Community of Christ leaders, future decisions and planning because I, I know that was one of your goals is to help direct you into the future?

Stassi Cramm 16:08

Yeah, well, it's, it's definitely going to impact our decisions and planning for, I think, an ongoing period of time. It's, it would have been really nice if there had been one clear, concise pathway that says this is what the church would prefer that we do. But we didn't get that. So, for sure, every time we make a decision, or look to potentially change something, the one thing that the survey has emphasized is how important lots and lots of communications and explanations will be, so that leaders can understand what we're doing and why we're doing it. But I think I can maybe summarize the immediate impact into four categories. One I've already mentioned, and that's financial transparency. The second is the desire for continued centralized business and support services. The third is implementing ways to simplify

processes and help leaders understand how money flows and why it needs to flow that way. And the fourth is exploration of ways to connect with new contributors. So, let me expand on each of those just a little bit. The Presiding Bishopric and other World Church leaders are really committed to financial transparency. I know even before you retired, we worked really closely with you on how to communicate, how to make information, uh, easily accessible and available. And, so, we are continuing to, to work on those processes. We answer every question we receive. And we try to provide routine updates on critical information, including posting the annual audit on the church's website. It's funny, because just last night I got an email from a member who had found the 2019 audit and was looking for the 2020 audit. And so, you know, I responded back and let them know the schedule and, and what we're doing and answered their particular question. So, that's just one example of the kind of emails that we get that we try to respond to. We also, uh, are now publishing two financial updates per year in June and December which, uh, those follow our May and, and we have a May Finance Board meeting and then a December Finance Board meeting. We also now have one in September, but we're just kind of doing the two updates because those updates get translated into three languages and so it's little bit easier to support them twice a year. And they also get printed in the, uh, Herald. We, um, also try to use social media and the social media team to promote the availability of information out to leaders and members and friends so that they know what's going on. We try to, you know, provide stories about missions so there's clarity on how tithing is being used. Um, but if anyone listening to this podcast has suggestions on ways that they believe would be, um, uh, better or that would provide greater transparency and accountability, we'd love to receive those suggestions via email. And the general email is just the words presidingbishopric no space, just all together, presidingbishopric@cofchrist.org. So, that's kind of what we're doing with transparency. On the second item, overall, the respondents did not want to take over responsibility for business and support services. There was very limited support for decentralizing those. Uh, the most valued services identified by the survey respondents were fiscal services and membership records. If the response, or if the survey respondents had to take over something locally, risk management, primarily the insurance program, was the area that was most selected. But even that got very limited support and our consultants actually warned us, they're like, Okay, you're looking at this as the most, uh, frequently responded to item, but you need to recognize that the number of responses is still pretty small. And, you know, you asked about surprises, perhaps that was a bit of a surprise, because we actually thought that more leaders might want to be on their own to provide insurance and not have to participate in the current centralized insurance program. I know sometimes people worry about the cost of insurance, so we always tell people, if they think they can do better, get a quote and get details on that policy and we will sit down with them and compare how that, uh, how their bid looks like compared to the centralized insurance program. But, at least based on the survey, I think a lot of our leaders understand how complex that is. There was also a lot of support for legal services, but primarily by the respondents who had used those services in the past. So, there's something about being involved in a dispute or a lawsuit or complex contract and having to work with legal services that kind of helps emphasize how important it is to have that support system there. So, based on all this feedback, we are going to actually be making a change in the 2022 billing for property and liability insurance. And we'll be sending out a letter to all of the Congregational Financial Officers and Mission Center Financial Officers in the next several weeks. Since before 2000, the property and liability insurance invoice has always included some expenses for the work of International Headquarters staff. The intent was to include, as part of the insurance billing, some of the employee expenses incurred that were related to the risk program. The amount included in the invoice

has always been a partial recovery of expenses and has never fully covered all of the actual expenses. That amount, since 2018, has been \$500,000 and so it gets allocated across everyone's bill and the amount is about 10% of each entity's bill. You can't really identify it on the bill the way we had done the bills because it was just included in the overall allocation. So, in 2022, we are going to increase that amount to 700,000. That increase is being implemented to include the actual expenses needed to cover the people providing services to the field in support of the insurance program and other legal matters. On average, using our 2021 allocations, this change will result in about a 4% increase on each bill. We're still trying to get estimates from our brokers on what other increases to expect in our 2022 billing based on floods and fires and all the things that are going on that impact the insurance industry. But the other thing that we're going to do in 2022, is we will identify this amount separately on the invoices. And it'll be on the last page and it'll just be called legal risk services so that it's really clear what is direct insurance cost and what is recovery of staffing support from headquarters. So that's kind of one of the ways that we're responding to trying to get leaders more information, and to make sure that centralized support can continue to happen. The other thing we learned how complex many of our processes are as we tried to explain how they work to our consultants. And even as I'm saying all these words to you and your podcast listeners, I'm like, Oh my gosh. I'm sure people's eyes have just like rolled back into their heads at this point. So, um, we could tell in the responses that some people were unclear exactly what their local and worldwide mission tithes support. And we know that it's important for people to be able to understand how their money is getting used. So, um, we anticipated this, but having the confirmation was really important in helping us consider how to implement ways to simplify processes and help leaders understand how money flows and why. So, we're going to continue to try to work really hard on that. It's always a balance between too much information and not enough information and we're going to continue to look for how to balance that. And then the fourth area is that most of the respondents were people who have given to mission tithes in the past even if they're not currently giving. And as our listeners could tell from the demographics, our current contributors are starting to, uh, be a little bit older. We've also published quite a bit, a bunch of information about our current contributors in various financial updates. So, it's really important that we find ways to connect with new generations of disciples in a variety of cultural contexts. The financial circumstances of the World Church, as well as our local congregations and mission centers, in the next few years is pretty hopeful as I think we'll be able to continue to support current levels of ministries and services. But if we want to, um, be able to continue those into the future, you know, even beyond meeting the retirement responsibility portion of the Bridge of Hope goal, we're going to have to find new ways to connect with younger contributors. So again, this is not new information. We shared several points about this in the June 2021 financial update. So, at the risk of being on a soapbox, though, I really feel like we need to repeat some of those points. And if people want to read them in detail, they can find the financial update on the church's website. So I want to say that Community of Christ contributors to mission tithes are very generous. So, those who give, they give generously and they continue to grow how much they give each year. And we are so thankful for that. But the reality is the number of contributors that we have are declining and so, um, the, the contributors that we have just cannot make up the difference as our number of contributors decline. Now, that's not a recent trend, it's been going on for more than 25 years. And in fact, from 2010 to 2020, in the US and Canada, the number of contributors to worldwide mission tithes dropped from 13,300 to 7600. So, that's not quite 50%, but it's really close to 50%. From 2019 to 2020, there was a significant decline in contribution to worldwide mission tithes in fields outside of Canada and US. Now, likely that was a result of the global pandemic, but, uh, the data does not

show an ongoing increase in giving even where membership is growing. So, you know, so we've got decreasing membership, which leads to decreasing contributions in places like the western part of the world. We have growing membership in other parts of the world, but not necessarily increasing contributions. So, for the past five years, over 80% of worldwide mission tithes in Canada and the US were given by those 60 and older, and each year, that percentage continues to increase. In 2020, contributors in Canada and the US who were 59 and younger gave 13% or about, just under 1.6 million of the 12.13 million collected. So, the trend is clear that funding worldwide mission through worldwide mission tithes will become less viable in the coming years. So, we're going to have to find, you know, new ways, um, to connect with people's passion and their desire and willingness to support the church's mission financially. We're not alone in this. Based on general research accomplished by Barna, Pew Research Center and other really, religious research groups, World Church leaders believe there is a potential for disciples under the age of six to financially support ministries and services of both the local and World Church. The research and conversations indicate that there is unrealized capacity in all the fields of the church. We just have to find the new and innovative methods, um, that will support connecting people's wallets with their passion and desire for mission in the church. Um, so we'll continue to work on this. The, the surveys that are being accomplished, uh, both this one plus other conversations that are occurring around the church, will continue to inform us and if anyone has any ideas or suggestions, again, I would invite them to email us at presidingbishopric@cofchrist.org. So, Linda, as you can tell, we learned a lot from the survey responses and those learnings are influencing decisions and plans for the future. And we'll definitely be providing more information, um, and, and summarizing some of this and maybe some additional thoughts that we work on in our December financial update.

Linda Booth 30:18

So I would encourage Coffee Buzz listeners to go on the church's website and look at some of those financial updates. And then stay tuned for those that come out, uh, uh, twice a year. As you've been sharing, Stassi, it's reminded me of how important Community of Christ members and friends of the church are. The findings from that 4000 plus responses, they really do have the potential to impact the church's future and already, from your report to us, we see that it's, it is now impacting the way in which communication occurs, etc. I also know that members' and friends' of the church prayerful support makes a big difference. I'm thinking, uh, that if people prayerfully consider their own financial support to Christ's mission, then those prayers and the impact on their contributions will really impact the church's future. Stassi, what are your thoughts on the power of prayer and the power of one disciple or a family to make a difference in Christ's mission?

Stassi Cramm 31:28

Yeah, that's really an important question, Linda. I, I think the power of prayer is significant and likely immeasurable. Prayer opens us up to the presence of the Holy Spirit and helps us align our heart with God's heart. This helps us practice whole life stewardship such that all that we have to tithe--our time, talent, treasures, and testimony--are all being shared in a way that best promotes and embodies Christ's mission. It just doesn't get any better than that. And I absolutely believe in the power of one disciple to make a difference in Christ's mission. But I also witness, almost daily, the multiplying impact when a community of disciples work together.

Linda Booth 32:18

Absolutely, Stassi. And there is great hope in that understanding of what can happen as we join together and multiply our impact through our prayerful consideration of what we can give and what we (Amen! Preach it, sister.) Yeah. On another point, I, I've got the June 9th through the 11th in 2022, pre-conference, uh, online gathering on my calendar. And I know that is, that the First Presidency and others are now fully engaged in planning for the 2023 World Conference which is scheduled for April 21st to the 29th. Now, you've also been encouraging folks to engage in study and discussion on nonviolence in preparation for the 2023 World Conference. Remind the Coffee Buzz listeners of resources that are available to assist them in their study and discussion. And also, the First Presidency is asking people to submit their thoughts to help you, the First Presidency, to draft a statement on nonviolence to bring back to the 2023 World Conference for the delegates' consideration. How can listeners submit their ideas to the First Presidency? And is there a deadline?

Stassi Cramm 33:43

Oh, my. There is so much I want to say about this topic. But I know we need to wrap up this podcast so that it doesn't get too lengthy. So, let me just focus on just a few key items. To help the church prepare, we, uh, have developed many resources. And those have been developed under the series on Jesus the peaceful one. So, if you go to the church's website and just Google guiding question at cofchrist.org, you'll get a listing of all the different resources, videos, printed resources, you know, that people can use, um, to explore and go deeper in our understanding of who Jesus is and who Jesus calls us to be and how nonviolence fits with that. You can also find material at the Herald House website. In fact, there's at least two really good study guides there. You go to the Herald House website. At the top of the menu, you click on Member Created and then there's a drop down menu and one of the topics is nonviolence. And if you click on that, that will take you to the page. And all of those study guides are free. They're just available to be downloaded. Now, for 2021, there was the reunion adult text that was developed and translated into French and Spanish. That adult text is also serving as our 2023 World Conference preparation resource. So, we're probably going to end up changing the cover on it just to make it, sure it's really clear after we come through, um, summer in the Northern Hemisphere, and that this resource is living on and that people, uh, need to go and take a look at it. So, again, that resource is available for free and you go to the church's website, you Google reunion 2021, and then you look for the adult text. Eventually, we're going to get that link also moved to the, um, the Jesus the peaceful one page. That's resource ends with the invitation, Linda, that you were talking about for people to send the First Presidency their thoughts and reflections on what should be included in a statement on nonviolence. I hope everyone listening to this podcast will respond to that invitation by emailing their thoughts to fp@cofchrist.org. To help with our initial work, we really would like to have people's responses as soon as possible, um, but by the end of 2021, so 31 December 2021. But the conversation won't end there. So, if for some reason someone forgets to do it and then remembers it after the end of this year, we would certainly encourage them to still send along their topics. This is an important topic and the important outcome is not actually what the statement will say that the conference finally approves. Because just putting words on paper, or words in a file, isn't really the critical element. What's really important is how our study and our conversations, and our prayerful consideration of the topic, and all of the experiences that we are going through together as we journey, how that shapes and forms us, and how it changes in how we understand how to act in seeking justice as we try to build peace for everyone and on the earth. And we won't finish the statement, I don't even

think in 2023. I think we'll end up, you know, using that World Conference to continue to work on consensus building and on understanding. And I'm guessing it's probably going to be 2026 before we actually finalize something. But it's, it's a difficult topic so we really need people not to wait until later, but to start the journey right now.

Linda Booth 37:45

Excellent. And, and that just goes back to what we were talking about before of how important it is for each individual member of Community of Christ and friend of the church to participate in that journey. And what we achieve or what we conclude or what we discern together will be more important because of all those who participated in the journey. So, last month in my Coffee Buzz conversation with President Steve Veazey, I concluded by asking him two questions that I would like to ask you, my friend. The first one is, What are some of the greatest challenges you face as a leader in Community of Christ? And perhaps even the survey responses and your answers maybe reflect one of those challenges, but I'm sure there is more. And also, What brings you hope in the midst of those challenges?

Stassi Cramm 38:43

Yeah, so actually, I wish now I had the chance to go back and listen to Steve's answers so I could cheat and just use what he told you. But I'm not really remembering off the top of my head. I did listen to his podcast, but I'm not remembering what he said. So, I guess I'm just gonna have to wing it on my own. You know, they tell you to look for abundance in your life and most days, I feel pretty rich when it comes to challenges. So, I have an abundance of challenges I feel like, um, in my service with the church. It probably comes as no surprise to you or to your listeners that as the Presiding Bishop I carry the weight of the church's finances in significant ways. I know I don't carry it alone, but there's something about having to have that particular title that makes it very personal. I'm sure it's just like Steve being President/Prophet. Even though Scott and I want to bear those burdens with him, he sits in the seat and that changes his feeling. And the Presiding Bishop in their own way has that same feeling, I think. I want to make sure that the church fulfills all its financial responsibilities. Uh, the primary one at this point being our, uh, responsibility to all of the faithful, current and future retirees of the church. So Bridge of Hope is really important and the element of, of that retirement responsibility. The second part of Bridge of Hope and our endowments is also important because I want to make sure that the church can continue to respond to mission around the world. And I see how much endowments can really help stabilize funding and create sustainable support and income. I know that I cannot accomplish any of this alone. My personal accounts and checkbooks, um, as, as generous as Steve and I try to be, we cannot bear the financial burden. Um, and so I'm constantly considering how we can help people connect their sense of passion and desire to support the church's mission with specific ways to respond. I honestly believe, as I mentioned a little bit ago, that there are adequate funds available within our community and within the broader community who really sees value and what Community of Christ is all about. So, I feel the challenge of how we help people recognize how to connect their passion, um, with their financial support. So, that's, that's, I think, one of the really biggies. But in my role in the Presidency, I also kind of feel that responsibility of making connections because I feel the challenge is, How do we help people form Spirit-led groups who are shaped by Community of Christ identity, message, mission and beliefs, and that are actively engaged in seeking justice in local context. The restoration movement has always been about building Zion, or God's vision of Shalom. That is

unchanging, but how we go about that has to adapt. And we have to be able to respond to the local context where each one lives out there discipleship. In some parts of the world, we face a growing skepticism about organized religion, while in other parts of the world, we face a growing financial crisis in how to support those so desperately trying to be communities of Christ. So, once again, it is only together that all these contexts can find blessings and respond faithfully. I go back to the old prophet in the Hebrew Scriptures, and in recent scriptures in the Doctrine and Covenants, in their welfare resides your welfare. We are all connected and we have to care and concern about each other. We can't just put up our blinders and only focus on what's happening in our own congregation. We have to recognize how we are connected around the globe. Um, and so part of the leadership challenge is to help, uh, people recognize that connection and help people feel responsible for each other and then, um, help them find ways to, to respond. So, it's not just about like guilting people or making people feel bad. In fact, it's just the opposite. It's about how to help them connect and see the possibilities of the difference that they can make. So, again, I could go on and on, but let me just jump to how I find hope because I think it relates to those connections. I choose to see all those connections and to see the difference that each one of us can make, especially when we work together. And in that same Spirit, I choose hope. It would be easy, especially in my job, to allow fear, despair, uncertainty, and doubt to dominate my days. But my life experiences have taught me that hope is something you choose every day. I choose to see the half full glass. I choose to see the good that is being accomplished amidst the struggles. I choose to be in relationship with those that associate with Community of Christ, just like you, Linda, and I recognize that my life would be so much less if I hadn't met you and had the chance to serve with you and all the others I've met through the years. I choose to believe that what I do, what you do, what we all do, is making a difference and will continue to make a difference if we do our very best to live faithfully moving closer to and embodying Jesus, the peaceful one. So I choose hope.

Linda Booth 45:00

Oh, thank you, Stassi. I choose hope, too. And I, I want to thank you so much for your willingness to enter into this Coffee Buzz conversation.

Stassi Cramm 45:11

Well, thank you, Linda. I love your questions. They keep me on my toes and I really appreciate that. So, I hope it's beneficial to your listeners.

Linda Booth 45:19

It, I know it is. I know it is. And I, I want to thank you also for the sacrifices that you have made on behalf of the church. I'm thankful for your brilliant mind and your compassionate heart which has blessed me and so many people who have experienced your ministry and leadership and the worldwide church. And I mentioned your sacrifices that you've made, but I'm also very appreciative of the sacrifices your husband, Steve, and your grown children, Shannon and Spencer, have made to share you with the church. So, you give our thanks to them, please. And thank you Coffee Buzz listeners for joining our conversation. I hope Stassi's words have challenged you and made you realize how important you are to Community of Christ's future and Christ's mission to the world. Please watch for next month's episode of Coffee Buzz. I'll be having a conversation with President Scott Murphy who is a counselor to President Steve Veazey.

Josh Mangelson 46:35

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