

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.

Carla Long 00:32

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long. Today I'm looking forward to interviewing three—yes, three guests, and to learning more about this topic, because I actually don't know a lot about it myself. Today we'll be talking about prophetic succession in Community of Christ. Now, I live here in Salt Lake City, and just recently, there's a changeover in the prophet-president of the LDS church. That sparked a lot of questions about how Community of Christ chooses the next president. To be perfectly honest, it's definitely different than what people might have experienced before. I'm happy to have some resident experts discuss how the succession has been in the past, as well as in more modern times. On today's podcast, we have president of the Council of Twelve Apostles, Linda Booth, Apostle Lachlan Mackay, and senior president of seventy, John Wight. I cannot wait to talk to you—all three of you. Thank you so much for being on the podcast.

Linda Booth 01:38

Hello, I'm Linda Booth. As Carla said, I serve as the president of the Council of Twelve, perhaps one of the most diverse councils in the history of Community of Christ, with women and nationality and races, *etc.* I also serve as a field apostle in the South-Central USA field. And I also am Director of Communications, which means I work with a fabulous team who do the web—the Community of Christ website—the Herald magazine, social media, resource production, marketing, public relations, *etc.*

Lachlan MacKay 02:17

Lachlan MacKay here. I have the Northeast field in the US; that's basically Michigan and then Kirtland to Maine to Virginia. I also am the team lead for the Community of Christ Historic Sites team, and lead the Church History and Sacred Story team as well.

John Wight 02:36

And I'm John Wight, senior president of seventy. I also serve as the president of the sixth quorum of seventy. As senior president, I coordinate the efforts of all of the Council of Presidents of Seventy, currently made up of eight presidents of seventy. As the quorum president, I support and provide educational opportunities for all of the seventies in the sixth quorum of seventy. The sixth quorum is made up of Lach's field and Janeé Grover's field, and I provide that support in those two fields.

Carla Long 03:15

Well, thank you so much, all three of you for being here. Gentle listener, I'm not sure if you realize how difficult it was to get these three people in the same room, ready to do a podcast at the same time. It practically took an act of God because they are very, very busy people. I am super-, super-grateful that you guys took some time out of your schedule to do this podcast with us. Thanks again for being here.

Linda Booth 03:42

You're welcome. It's our pleasure.

Carla Long 03:43

I'm gonna start with Lachlan. He...Oh, thank you...I want to start with Lachlan. He's our history expert here. Lachlan, there's always been some speculation about who Joseph Smith Jr. wanted to run the church after him. Can you shed some light on this issue for us? What was Joseph thinking and saying about this?

Lachlan MacKay 04:05

Sure. Unfortunately, he wasn't abundantly clear on that topic. He had designated different people at different times. He also was pretty focused at times on familial authority or this idea of lineal priesthood. I think there's compelling evidence that Joseph hoped that his brother Hyrum would lead the church if anything happened to Joseph, and if anything happened to Hyrum, I think he would have turned to Samuel, the other...another brother, but unfortunately, of course, Hyrum is killed with Joseph and Samuel dies just a month later. So that didn't work out.

There were others who probably had claims through their offices: people like David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, who had been ordained as associate or assistant presidents at different times. Yet others claim to have letters of appointment, like James Strang. Some people think his letter was a forgery. I think it might have been real but I think what Joseph was probably saying to Strang, who had joined the church just very shortly before Joseph's death...I think Joseph was saying "If anything happens to me, carry on the work up there where you're at" versus "If anything happens to me, you're in charge," which is how James Strang interpreted it. Others turned to the Council of Twelve at the time, based on what's understood as a final charge to the Twelve. I really think what that was in the second story of the red brick store, was a final charge to the Council of Fifty—this secret organization that was charged with bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth—so I think Joseph is talking to the Council of Fifty and the Twelve are part of the Fifty, but later that would be remembered as a final charge to the Twelve.

I think what's really important in thinking about succession in the 1830s and 40s is to look at Doctrine and Covenants Section 104, which is Section 107 in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants. It says the First Presidency is equal in authority with the Council of Twelve, who is equal in authority with the quorum of the seventy who is equal in authority with the Standing High Council. You have these four groups that are all equal in authority, although there was a very clear delineation of authority. Anywhere the church was organized, it is the Standing High Council that was responsible; so in a stake, the Standing High Council, but in the rest of the world it is that the Traveling High Council or Council of Twelve. That was an 1830s understanding and the Kirtland Temple pulpits reflect that, for example. There are seats for the stake president, or the Stake High Council president, but there are no seats—all those letters on the pulpits of the Kirtland Temple—no seats for the Council of Twelve or the seventy because they weren't supposed to be there—they're out in the rest of the world, converting the rest of the world. Section 104, or LDS 107, would be critically important when it came to questions of succession, and that continued in Community of Christ to the present day. LDS 104—very, very, very important.

Based on that section, Emma Smith at Joseph's death believed that William Marks probably had the best succession claim. He was the stake president in Nauvoo, the seat of church government, and the president of the Stake High Council at the time. A quote from Emma was—again she's referring to William Marks—“Now as the Twelve have no power with regard to the government of the church and the stakes of Zion, but the High Council have all power, so it follows that on removal of the First President, the office would devolve upon the president of the High Council in Zion.” Immediately following Joseph's death, Emma initially supported William Marks. Marks was opposed to plural marriage though, or polygamy, and so if you were engaged in plural marriage you were not going to support William Marks as Joseph's successor. Marks himself wasn't particularly interested in leadership. He supported Sidney Rigdon, a surviving member of the First Presidency, but Rigdon also not a fan of plural marriage and so was not supported by many.

I've mentioned earlier that after Joseph, I think Joseph intended it to be Hyrum. Part of that also was that Hyrum was the Presiding Patriarch—would now call it the Evangelist—and Joseph had said in 1843 that the office of patriarch was the highest office in the church. William Smith, soon the only surviving Smith brother, used that argument to advance his claims of leadership following his brothers' deaths. So yet another option—William—but not supported by many at all.

Probably the best discussion of those early claims is D. Michael Quinn and his [*The*] *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, so if you're interested in succession discussions, that's a really good resource. He kind of goes through all the options and what their claims were.

Another really important Doctrine and Covenants section, particularly in Community of Christ, would be Section 43. It's Section 43:2a that says “None else shall be appointed unto this gift” (meaning receiving commandments or revelations) “except it be through him” (meaning the prophet-president). We've understood that to mean that the prophet-president can designate their successor, and so based on this Section 43 and the idea that we'd understand that Joseph III was blessed by his father or designated by his father—both in the Liberty jail in 1839, and the red brick store in 1844—to someday lead the church, we turned initially to Joseph Smith III, but, let me clarify, not at his father's death when he was 11½. Some believed that the 11-year-old boy should lead at Joseph Smith Jr.'s death, but most believe that to be a reference to some future leadership. A number of various Latter Day Saint traditions approached Joseph III through the years, but eventually he chose to affiliate with what would become the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. April of 1860, Joseph III and Emma traveled to Amboy, Illinois, and Joseph III was ordained by Zenas Gurley, who was then the president of the Council of Twelve, William Marks, Samuel Powers and W.W. Blair, who were both apostles. Marks would be the best known of those gentlemen, remember the ‘stake president in the seat of church government,’ and again the person that some would argue had the most authority or the best claim to succeed Joseph at his death.

That was a long answer. I'll be shorter from here on out.

Carla Long 11:23

Oh no, I hope that you're not shorter—that was really interesting. It sounded like at the beginning, Joseph Smith, Jr. was a little bit like Oprah: he was all “You get the presidency, you get the presidency, you get the presidency.” Then after he was killed, everyone's like, “I get the presidency, I get the presidency.” What was going on in the sixteen years between 1844 and 1860, before Joseph Smith III became president-prophet of the RLDS church.

Lachlan MacKay 11:56

Many different leaders came out of Nauvoo, and because different people had claims...let me back up and tell you that that I do not believe Joseph knew he was going to Carthage in June of 44 to die, because I think he cared deeply about the church, and I think if he knew that, I think he would have said, “Okay everybody, here is exactly what is supposed to happen next.” He didn't do that. I think he knew he was in danger going to Carthage, I don't think he knew he was going to die.

But because different people had claims, a number of groups came out of Nauvoo, and those groups would later splinter as well. Soon Latter Day Saints are heading off in all directions; some following James Strang eventually to Michigan, some with Sidney Rigdon back to Pennsylvania, Lyman Wight to Texas (like John's ancestor), eventually some end up in Minnesota, some of course setting across the plains with Brigham Young.

Slowly, some of those people started to come back together in the early 1850s. Some had coalesced around James Strang originally. One of Strang's...the things that were attractive about him—he was very charismatic, he was doing the things you'd expect a prophetic leader to do, he was finding and translating plates. He also was publicly opposed to plural marriage or polygamy, which was very attractive to a number of the folks. But after a number of years, they realize that James Strang was traveling the country with his nephew, Charlie Douglas, who was really his first plural wife dressed up as a boy, which was just devastating, as you can imagine, to these people who had supported him because of his position on monogamy. That was a really critical group of people that had followed Strang and then rejected him.

Another group followed William Smith, the only surviving Smith brother, who also was publicly opposed to plural marriage, but then eventually revealed that he's secretly teaching it. His followers reject him. Those two groups—that had followed James Strang and those who had followed William Smith—became the core of what would become the Reorganization. Really only a couple of things in common—they were very much opposed to plural marriage, they supported monogamy, and they believe that Joseph intended one of his children to lead. They eventually convince Joseph III again to join with them by 1860. Although some had really turned to David, Joseph and Emma's youngest son. Joseph had apparently made some prophecies related to his unborn son; David was born five months after his father's killed. So he also ends up involved in some of the succession discussions, particularly for folks in the West.

Carla Long 14:40

Let's jump back over to Joseph Smith III. He was 11 years old in 1844, and then if I'm correct, in 1852 I think you said Jason Briggs and Zenas Gurley approached him? Do they approach him specifically

about being the next prophet-president? What they believe? Or did they have to convince him that this is where he was called to be? How did that work out?

Lachlan MacKay 15:07

Although they come together in the early 1850s, they don't actually approach him until a number of years later. They send missionaries to Nauvoo. They sit down and meet with him and explain that they're hoping he will affiliate and lead. He stops just short of kicking them out of his house. He really wanted nothing to do with them. But one of the missionaries stayed behind and actually worked with and for Joseph III, and spent about a year down there just building that relationship. Joseph III also had a number of experiences in his own life that led him to believe that he should eventually affiliate with the Reorganization. At least one of those experiences is somewhat reminiscent of his father's grove experience. This experience he understood to be with the Divine, encouraging him to answer the call to serve.

Carla Long 16:04

Joseph Smith III became president-prophet of the church in 1860. Then after him—he was president for a long time, right? Like 50 years or something?

Lachlan MacKay 16:15

Yeah, maybe 54 years. He's widowed twice, married three times, and succeeded by three of his sons in that role, the third of whom became a prophet-president 98 years after his father first became our president. Pretty incredible. Now that happens because Joseph III is having children in his early 70s, but pretty amazing. He's initially—and we'll talk in a little more detail about some of them—but initially, Joseph III is followed by his son Frederick Madison Smith; when Fred M. dies, he is followed by his full brother Israel A. Smith; when Israel dies, he is followed by their half-brother, W. Wallace Smith; who was then followed by his son Wallace B. Smith; who is followed by W. Grant McMurray; who is followed by Stephen Veazey, which is where we're at today.

Carla Long 17:15

And then is followed by...I'm just kidding, we don't know. (laughter)

Let's talk a little bit about those three sons that became president. F.M. Smith, whom the Graceland library is named after as the first Graceland graduate, I believe, and Israel A. and W. Wallace. Can you talk a little bit about how they became the president-prophet of the church?

Lachlan MacKay 17:39

Yeah. Frederick Madison Smith was really going to be a stunning engineer, but he also eventually ended up studying at Clark with G. Stanley Hall, one of the pre-eminent sociologists of the day. It looked like Fred might be on a different path, and I think that there were some who thought he, as a young person might be better suited for another path. He was not particularly engaged in religious life, but eventually became engaged. In 1902, Fred M. Smith, and RC Evans, who was a Canadian church leader, incredibly charismatic, are called into the First Presidency. That's Doctrine and Covenants Section 126 in the Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants.

RC Evans is an amazing story. He was, again, an incredible speaker, and thought very highly of himself, and many thought highly of him as well. One of my favorite RC memories, though, is that we had a beautiful church in Toronto, with stunning stained glass windows: one was Jesus Christ, one was Joseph in the grove, and one was RC Evans! RC thought that since he was in the First Presidency—and it's true that it was not automatic that a son of Joseph III would lead—so RC thought that he had a pretty good shot. Joseph III invited him to go on a mission with him to the United Kingdom, and Fred M. was left home. RC thought, “Well, that's pretty good evidence,” so there was some probably tension building at that point in time.

Then Doctrine and Covenants Section 127 comes to the church, that's 1906, and it references some misunderstandings about Section 126. Then it says...this is Section 127:8d...“it is now declared that in the case of the removal of my servant now presiding over the church by death or transgression, my servant Frederick M. Smith, if he remain faithful and steadfast, should be chosen, in accordance with the revelations which have been hitherto given to the church concerning the priesthood.” So, an official designation in 1906, Joseph III designating Fred M. Smith. But Joseph III had lived through the succession crisis following Joseph Smith Jr., and he wanted to make sure that that did not happen again, and so he revisited the issue in 1912.

If the most important document related to succession in Community of Christ is Section 104 of the Doctrine and Covenants (LDS Section 107) then I'd say the second most important document is this letter of instruction published in the 13th March 1912 Saints Herald—if anybody wants to track it down, it's volume 59, and number 11. This document, this letter of instruction, is really rooted in Section 104 and Section 43. It is what has guided succession in Community of Christ ever since. It makes very clear that we understand that the prophet-president is chosen through revelation; we understand that the prophet **can** designate their successor—doesn't necessarily have to—talks about lineage and Fred M. and basically says that, if all else is equal, then lineage matters. It again reinforces the designation of Fred M. to follow Joseph III. And this is a really critical point—it makes clear that we understand that when the president dies, or is removed from office, the quorum of the presidency survives. The presidency is not automatically dissolved at the death or removal of the president. That comes from Doctrine and Covenants 104, and Doctrine and Covenants Section 87, and Doctrine and Covenants Section 99. That would become critically important in future years as well. The remaining counselors stopped being counselors, but they still form a quorum of the presidency, and they act in that role until the next General Conference, when the Council of Twelve takes up the matter of succession.

Although Fred M. had not left behind a document designating his successor when he died in 1946, he had indicated in a 1938 meeting of the church leaders, that if anything happened to him (Fred M.), his brother Israel would be next in line. Seeking confirmation of that call though, since there have been a number of years pass when Fred M. dies, members of the Twelve invited Elbert A. Smith, Presiding Patriarch and a former member of the First Presidency, to seek the will of the Lord confirming that call, and so Israel replaces his brother in 1946.

John, do you want to tell us about W. Wallace Smith?

John Wight 23:00

Sure. When Israel was killed in June of 1958, he had authored a letter, which we now know as Doctrine and Covenants Section 144, in which he named W. Wallace as his successor. As Lach has already mentioned, W. Wallace was a half-brother. At that point, the Council of Twelve used a similar process as had been followed in 1946. They established a committee, which interviewed President Edwards and Bishop DeLapp to determine the authenticity of this letter in which W. Wallace was named. That committee recommended accepting the letter as being authentic, and then the Council of Twelve brought that recommendation to the church in October of 1958. Brother W. Wallace was ordained as a result of that.

Lachlan MacKay 24:09

Can we jump back just for a minute as certain I might have failed to mention this, and I'm not sure if you did either. Israel was killed—what happened?

John Wight 24:16

Oh, he died in an automobile accident.

Linda Booth 24:19

On his way home or to Graceland University.

John Wight 24:25

Yes.

Following W. Wallace was Wallace B., his son, and then following Wallace B. was Grant McMurray. The reason I mentioned both of those together is that the process for those two—the succession of those two—was quite different from all preceding processes. In both cases, the outgoing president remained in office and guided the process up to the moment that the new president's nomination was considered by the World Conference. In 1978, the Council of Twelve presided over the consideration of the nomination of Wallace B., and in 1996 Howard Sheehy, as a member of the presidency, presided over the nomination and subsequent sustaining of Grant McMurray to the office of prophet-president.

Anything else Lach, that you want to share about those?

Lachlan MacKay 25:37

I'll just throw out that that I have spent most of my adult life 'living in the 19th century' and so I am new to the 20th and 21st century, so I appreciate Len Young's efforts at helping me understand succession in the 20th century a little better. Len, a former member of Community of Christ Council of Twelve, has done a lot of research on the topic.

Carla Long 26:02

I appreciate it too—thank you. I have a little question, I guess. It feels like, at least in Community of Christ circles that I run in...it seems like we used words like "We've always had a Smith in the presidency" (up to Grant McMurray), "We've always done it this way" but it sounds like what you're saying is that it wasn't necessarily...that didn't have to be the case. Lach, you had mentioned that they can, but they don't have to, designate their successor; lineage matters if all else is equal. But what if

something wasn't all equal—they didn't have to choose someone from the Smith line. That, I think for a lot of Community of Christ people, has been like a source of pride, but it didn't have to be that way at all

Lachlan MacKay 26:55

There's been, I think, a lot of misunderstanding around that issue both with Community of Christ members and with cousins in the LDS tradition, I think, as well, about Community of Christ understanding. We've understood that lineage mattered but was by no means the only factor, and there was no requirement that it be a Smith. I think what was more important is that we understood the prophet-president designates the successor, and I vastly underestimated the importance of Section 104 and the equality in those leading quorums of the church.

Linda Booth 27:31

I would say though, generally membership was not aware of history and how succession occurred, and so it was a time...an unsettling time...for folks in the pews when W. B. designated Grant McMurray—who was the church secretary, had not served in the Council of Twelve or any of the leading quorums—to be designated. From my perspective as a member in the pew, there was quite a bit of discussion, and in some cases unease, about that new president.

Carla Long 28:12

That's actually exactly where I wanted to go Linda. So Linda, you've mentioned...you just mentioned what the feeling of the church was when Wally B...did he retire or did he resign from the presidency?

Lachlan MacKay 28:31

I guess my take is that he retired.

Linda Booth 28:33

Yes, that was my understanding as well—that he retired.

John Wight 28:37

And he became known as the Prophet-President Emeritus.

Linda Booth 28:41

Yes, and he had a really close relationship with Grant—President McMurray—and a great deal of trust and belief in his vision and prophetic guidance for the church. I was at that conference when Grant McMurray became the president, and I think quickly for those of us at that conference as we watched and listened to him in his presiding, were won over that this person, this man who is not a relative of any Smith, certainly had the giftedness and the prophetic vision to lead the church.

Lachlan MacKay 29:29

He also was a huge fan of church history—which I appreciated.

Linda Booth 29:33

And he had an incredible sense of humor, and so while he led the people sometimes through very difficult topics, he was able to bring that light and joy into the conference at times where people were concerned, or having difficulty in coming to agreement.

Carla Long 29:55

John, were you working for the church at that point...when...and what year are we talking about when W. Grant McMurray became president-prophet?

John Wight 30:05

1996.

Carla Long 30:07

1996. John, were you working for the church then?

John Wight 30:09

Yes, I was.

Carla Long 30:11

And what do you remember about that time?

John Wight 30:14

As has already been said, it was kind of a mixed feeling among the membership, I think, from my perspective anyway, there were some who thought that it felt strange to not have a descendant of Joseph Smith Jr. There were others who realized that this was perfectly possible from the get-go, and then there were some who just could not believe it, were quite upset, and were ready to leave the church because of this this new situation that we had not faced before.

Lachlan MacKay 30:56

The power of tradition.

John Wight 30:57

Yes.

Linda Booth 30:58

Yes, and it bumped up against the belief that some members of the church had, that we were the 'one true church,' and the way in which you prove that we were the 'one true church' was the fact that our president was a descendent of Joseph Smith Jr. For those who weren't able to let go of that understanding, it was a difficult time for them in their membership in Community of Christ, or what was then known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Carla Long 31:32

Oh, for sure. I can imagine that there was a lot of finger-pointing at that point at the RLDS church for departing off of...from having a Smith as the president-prophet, because while Wallace B. Smith had three daughters, correct, and while they could have been president-prophet of the church at that point

as women were starting to be ordained in 1984. Since that didn't happen, I wonder if there were some moments where people were wondering if that ordination of women was actually true—did we really believe in that? I have no idea—I was in college in 1996, but I was kind of off in my own little world so I don't really remember it all that well.

Linda Booth 32:17

I think it would have been a bigger shock to the people, at least those I knew in the church, if one of his daughters would have succeeded him. Because we didn't have women in the leading quorums of the church until Grant McMurray called myself and Gail Mengel to come into the Council of Twelve in 1998. I think...I didn't hear anyone saying, "Well, it should have been his daughter." In fact, I did hear them say "Well, it couldn't be his daughter so I guess maybe it should be Grant McMurray."

Carla Long 32:55

Oh, how interesting! What an interesting time. I don't actually...I don't remember how specific we were about this—Wally B. named Grant McMurray as president and he worked with the Council of Twelve you sat on doing that—is that correct?

John Wight 33:15

No, he just named him as his successor and let that be known. He in essence announced it and then the conference had to approve Grant as his successor.

Carla Long 33:33

That was pretty much following the line of F.M. Smith and Israel and W. Wallace: they all named their successor and that's just following down the line—what has always been happening, correct?

Lachlan MacKay 33:46

Yeah, although some were more clear about naming their successor than others, and Wally was still alive when that designation occurred. Sometimes in other cases it was a letter that that came to the church that had been written and put in a vault, and then was shared with the church after the fact.

John Wight 34:09

As I said, Wallace B. brought that to the church, announced it, and that letter...that counsel to the church eventually came to be included in the Doctrine and Covenants as Section 160.

Linda Booth 34:27

Through common consent the people agreed to follow and support the ordination of Grant McMurray to be the president of the church.

Lachlan MacKay 34:37

And informed by Section 43, back to "the prophet can designate their successor."

Carla Long 34:44

Oh, this is so fascinating. Okay, that's in 1996, W. Grant McMurray became president-prophet of RLDS church. We changed our name in 2001, so he was the president-prophet over that. I bet that was a pretty big deal for him too. Like you said, he was president-prophet over some pretty tough stuff.

Linda Booth 35:06

And he changed the way in which the Joint Council served. He pulled together a group which he called the World Church Leadership Council, and on that council he included others, such as the president of the High Priest quorum, and the HR Director. That has shifted, but he really had a different view of who should be involved in decision making, or in counseling, giving guidance to the First Presidency.

Carla Long 35:39

I did not know that—good for him. So Grant McMurray resigned in what year?

John Wight 35:47

2004—in November of 2004.

Carla Long 35:52

This is my question for all three of you, since you've been Community of Christ'ers forever—for a long time. In 2004...November 2004...when Grant McMurray resigned, what was the mood of the church? How were people feeling? What was going on?

Linda Booth 36:07

Well, I'd like to share what...how the World Church Leadership Council heard about it. Because I was Director of Communication, I was pulled into it early, knowing that he was going to resign. We put together a communication plan for the church, which included letting leaders know. I remember when the counselors to Grant McMurray, who now became the First Presidency—President Ken Robinson and President Peter Judd—called together a...I don't know if they called it emergency, but it was certainly a quick meeting of the World Church Leadership Council to tell them of Grant McMurray's resignation. I remember when President Robinson said the words about the resignation, Bunda Chibwe—who is an apostle from Africa, was on the line, he wasn't in the room, not everyone could be there—I remember there was complete silence, and I remember Bunda Chibwe saying, "Oh, dear Lord." I believe his words were reflected throughout the church when they heard the news, because it was startling, it was questioning, and for the Council of Twelve it was a little daunting, because we realized that we were tasked with calling the church into a process of a discernment that would identify who the next president would be.

As a Council of Twelve, we took this task very seriously, and we invited the church into a prayerful reflection. We invited the church to send us testimonies of where they might think...who they might think should lead the church. We asked the quorums, the First Presidency, Peter and Ken, the presidents of seventy, the Presiding Bishopric—we asked all of them to be prayerful with us. The Council of Twelve made a decision that we would not talk amongst ourselves, listing the pros and cons of who should lead the church. But indeed we would enter this journey in a very prayerful way, not in a, what you might say, a political way of talking amongst ourselves and pulling together groups of people who might support this person or the next. Instead, we promised that we would pray for the church

every day and for one another. I remember waking up in the middle of the night, going around the offices in the Council of Twelve suite and praying for my colleagues, as we entered into this time of leadership. We also met every Tuesday morning, anyone that was in town, in a room in the Council of Twelve suite that we called the reflection room—which is now Lach's office. We prayed...whoever was available...we prayed together for direction and it was an amazing experience. I can tell more, but I'd like to hear my colleagues—what that experience was for them.

John Wight 39:27

I'd like to just add a couple of additional thoughts about this whole process. Grant had resigned, as I said, earlier in November of 2004—he actually resigned on November 28th. The meeting that Linda refers to was held on the 29th. So immediately, Ken Robinson and Peter Judd, the remaining members of the presidency, called a meeting of the Council of Twelve in the morning of the 29th, and then they convened what was to be known as the Special Joint Council. The reason that it was different than the World Church Leadership Council is that it included all of the presidents of seventy at that time, whereas the World Church Leadership Council normally only included the senior president of seventy. That was a very powerful moment. I was not serving as the senior president at that time, and I was one of the presidents of seventy that were called around that table on the afternoon of November 29th to hear the news, and then to begin to participate in that process.

Lachlan MacKay 40:43

And they were included because of Section 104.

John Wight 40:45

Yes, correct. Correct. I think it's also kind of interesting to note that at that time, the Council of Twelve passed a resolution specifically in support of the remaining members of the First Presidency, to indicate their support for them. Then the Special Joint Council agreed on a process, since Grant had not designated a successor. Part of that involved—and Linda can probably tell more about this—but that involved a special committee of the Council of Twelve developing a process that would take the church, the leading quorums, and all the way throughout the church, through the entire process. The Special Joint Council approved that and then we began to follow all of those steps.

I will tell you, from my own perspective, that was a very humbling experience. It was...the weight of that was quite heavy. I had not experienced anything like that. The burden of that, even though the presidents of seventy were just one among several leading quorums of the church, the weight of it was fairly intense. Our process involved going on retreat—we had seven presidents of seventy at the time—and we went off on retreat and spent much time in individual prayer, and then we would gather together for prayer time together and some discussion, and then we would go alone again. For us it was very, very intense, and one of those experiences that I will not forget.

Linda Booth 42:46

Yes, it was amazing.

Lachlan MacKay 42:48

My experience was very different, because I was the site director at Kirtland Temple historic site at the time. I, of course, wouldn't have known that this was happening. We got a message saying there was going to be an all-staff video conference, and so I gathered my staff in the old Kirtland Temple Visitor Center theater. I did have a little inside knowledge: I knew that an incredibly generous church family had recently given us \$40 million, and I was confident this staff meeting was to announce this incredibly generous \$40 million gift. Of course, that's not the news we heard that day. It was stunning. Made worse by my expectation.

Carla Long 43:40

Yes, what a big surprise for you!

Linda Booth 43:45

What he's saying was, it was a big...it was a shock to members of the Council of Twelve, presidents of seventy, all leadership, as well as membership. It was a shared gasp of what Bunda had said, "Oh, dear Lord." But we went into this journey in faith that God was faithful if we were faithful, that a name would emerge, and that that name would be the name designated to continue to lead Christ's mission through that prophet-president.

John Wight 44:19

I mention too, that the process that the Council of Twelve developed included a request to all of the quorums and councils represented on the Special Joint Council, that they report back with an official communication indicating their recommendations to the Council of Twelve by March 1st of 2005. This was not...remember the resignation occurred in November, the request for the recommendation was requested by March 1st, so this was not an overnight process. This took some time, and they were...everybody was very deliberate about it. The Council of Twelve then met on March 2nd...

Linda Booth 45:08

Oh, I want to tell that part...

First of all, it wasn't just the quorums of the church, including the Council of Twelve—it was the whole church. When I would travel in the fields of the church, there were prayers, mighty prayers given in gatherings where I attended, and people began to send in these letters to us, of people's names that they believed should lead the church. On that date, and on...right after all those were received, the Council of Twelve met in a colleague's home. In her small living room, we gathered, and it was a tight circle. All of the letters received by members were read, and names given, and all the quorums, Presiding Bishopric, Presiding Evangelists, the presidents of seventy, *etc.*—those recommendations were read. We had...over and over again after letters were read, we had prayer in that group, and I can quite honestly say it was as if the Spirit was tangible.

Then we were asked, each one, to share the name that we believed that God was presenting to the church. And you've got to remember, we didn't talk about this one to...I didn't talk with anyone else...and no one else talked with another. As we went around that circle, every name that was raised was that of Stephen M. Veazey. People shared powerful testimonies of how they had come to that conclusion. The testimony that I shared, as I had been praying I remembered a time when I had walked

through the First Presidency suite. You need to understand how the temple configuration is—the Council of Twelve Apostles suite is on... there's a door that opens up into a pathway that goes to the First Presidency's office, then there's another door down the corridor that opens up into the Presiding Bishopric's office. I was quickly walking...many years before, this occurred...I was walking quickly through there and as I looked into the door where I normally would have seen Grant McMurray, I thought I saw Steve Veazey. I remember walking through there going, "That is really weird—how could..." I mean, that must...I just put it aside and the more I prayed, I kept seeing that image of him sitting behind that desk. There were equally experiences shared by colleagues in the Council of Twelve of those "Aha!" moments as they prayed intentionally and passionately to God to lead them.

We left our colleague's home; we came back to the Temple; we went into the Council of Twelve; got a conference room. We pulled a chair up in the corner, where nobody could look through the doors and see us, and we gathered around our brother and our colleague, Stephen M. Veazey, and we prayed for him. If you can imagine what that experience might have been for Steve—I don't know what he was feeling but I could tell how humbled he was. It was as if the weight of being the president had already settled upon his shoulders. In that moment, we all recognized that our colleague was now entering a path and going on a journey that would take the church in a new place, because Steve had been a seventy, he had been president of seventy, he had been on the Council of Twelve, he had been the president of the Council of Twelve, and a Director of Field Ministry. We recognized that it was a new time in the life of the church.

John Wight 49:13

After that experience, then the Council of Twelve brought the name—Steve's name—before the Special Joint Council session, and that Special Joint Council gave its unanimous affirmation to Steve's call as well.

Linda Booth 49:30

And then we brought it to the church. You want to talk about that Lach?

Lachlan MacKay 49:34

I just was going to say that I was stunned, as I was preparing, to discover that I think Steve was in his late 40s.

Linda Booth 49:43

Yes, he was very young. He was one of the younger members on the council at that time.

Lachlan MacKay 49:48

Terrifying. (laughter) ...if you were him!

Linda Booth 49:51

Think about it...because I remember when the council elected him as president of the council, how humble he was at that moment. And so to think that so many of us had a similar experience that he was the one called, it was, it was...I can't even put a word on what that might have felt like.

Lachlan MacKay 50:11

Can you tell us a little bit more about that? He was elected president of the council? It's not that he was the longest serving,

Linda Booth 50:17

No, absolutely not. During World...an international World Conference, after the ordinations where new Council of Twelve members come into the Council of Twelve, the president of the church, and in this case, one of the counselors—either, I think it was Ken Robinson—would meet with the Council of Twelve. Then we elect who will serve as the president of the Council. We elect our own leader for that role.

Carla Long 50:51

You know, I...this kind of made me tear up a little bit, just hearing your account of this, because I think about the incredible amount of vulnerability it would take to basically not have a president—December, January, February, and then moving into March, and just trusting that God would be there with us, and walk with us through that. That takes an incredible amount of vulnerability. And when you were...Linda, when you were talking about that tiny little living room in that tight little circle, Steve of course, was there in that circle, right? And he was listening to his name being said over and over and over again, right?

Linda Booth 51:38

Yes, yes. And quite honestly, I only glanced at him a few times, because to look at him in that process, I just felt for him. I knew it was the right thing—all of us had the testimony—but to hear that, especially from his colleagues. He read the letters from the quorums, and he read the letters from members of the church. Not every one said 'Steve Veazey'—not even all the quorums of the church said 'Steve Veazey.' But in that circle of the Council of Twelve, everyone had the—while it was a different experience—the name was the same.

Carla Long 52:21

Yeah, I just can only imagine it was just this incredible experience. I have to tell you, I would love to read those letters from members of the church and from different groups of people. I bet they were amazing—I bet they were just incredible to read.

Linda Booth 52:35

Well, they were, but in some cases, like one of our names would...I mean, my name was mentioned once. I tell you, you like, swallow your tongue; it's like, hold your breath; you think, "Oh, dear Lord!" There were quite a few names of people mentioned, and like I said, even the quorums, not all quorums of the church had the same name. But the power of the Holy Spirit in that place in our colleague's home as we shared those testimonies, all of us had that affirming, "This is it. God is good, and we've been faithful, and God has been faithful to us."

Carla Long 53:19

Just an incredible process. I'm filled with a lot of pride in Community of Christ when I hear stories like this, that it's not just a formulaic type of succession. In the modern church, we really put a lot of time

and effort into discerning where God is calling us. I am just feeling really, really good about this whole podcast. Thank you so much for sharing your testimonies. I'm just really, really proud to call Community of Christ my own.

So we're up to March 2nd, 2005, right? The World Church Leadership Council now knows the name Stephen M. Veazey as the next president-prophet of the church, but the church doesn't know it yet. How does that information get out to the church, and how do we end up ordaining Steve as the president-prophet?

Linda Booth 54:14

As Director of Communication, we put together a very complex and wholistic way in which to make sure all bodies of the church heard the news. We used a variety of ways, from making sure Standing High Council knew, our affiliates knew, on and on and on—it was in the Herald, it was on the website, it was everywhere we could share it. A personal letter went out to all pastors telling them about the special conference, which...John will talk about the special conference...the conference would have the opportunity to come together through common consent to share their support as well for Stephen M. Veazey as our president-prophet.

John Wight 54:58

Part of the process that the Council of Twelve developed included calling a special World Conference to consider the selection of a new president. That was done quite early on in the process—the conference was called for June 2 through 5 of 2005. That is when Steve's name was brought before the entire World Conference and received affirmation at that time.

Linda Booth 55:26

The conference focused entirely upon this call. There was a great deal of prayer, there was a great deal of testimony, and then we had the vote of the common consent of the delegates to that international conference, who voted to support President Veazey being ordained. His ordination was remarkable, because typically we have two leaders ordaining the world church leaders to their office, such as Apostle or whatever it might be. But in this instance, Steve asked that there would be five people that would lay their hands upon his head, and they were from all over the world. They represented different cultures, different races, different genders. What I saw as he was being ordained, was “This is an international church, a group of people that walk this journey together,” and he was there to serve the whole church. You saw that in the faces of those who placed hands upon his head or shoulder.

Carla Long 56:47

I actually do remember—I think one of those people was Mareva Arnaud, correct?

Linda Booth 56:51

Absolutely, yes.

Carla Long 56:53

She later became an apostle from French Polynesia, but she was not an apostle at that time.

Linda Booth 56:58

No, she was not—she was not. I'm not sure she was...when I was in French Polynesia, I remember her, but she didn't have leadership in that mission center, even at that time. Later, she came to be an apostle, a very strong and insightful apostle.

Carla Long 57:16

Oh, you're right—that was a really meaningful and special moment. I can actually picture where I was sitting in the auditorium—14 years later. How special, how wonderful. Thank you for sharing that.

Steve has been president-prophet now since 2005. Only 13 years! Do we know where we go from here?

Linda Booth 57:46

Do I dare say, "God only knows."

Carla Long 57:50

No, I think you're exactly right—God only knows.

Linda Booth 57:52

I certainly wouldn't speculate about where we go from here. I do know that by practice, the presidency has in the vault a letter which might designate someone at this time, and there's always discussions about future. But none of us are speculating. We love the leadership of President Veazey. We appreciate him not only as a colleague who is extremely collaborative—he listens to the people, he listens to us. He has that strong sense of Christ's mission being alive and lived out in the life of the church. He's a thoughtful, sensitive man to the Holy Spirit, he has spiritual practices that he's involved in each day, of silence where he can listen. He is an exceptional president of the church, and I hope he's our president for a very long time.

Carla Long 58:52

I do too. I have a lot of respect for Steve Veazey. Although I will tell you a very quick story about him. I met him in the...he's known me since I was three years old or so, so he's known me for a long time, and he met me in the hallway a couple years ago when I was walking to my office in the Temple. He asked me if I'd seen that new movie Frozen. I said I had and he said, "Well, you kind of remind me of Olaf." (laughter) I hope that's not prophetic.

Linda Booth 59:21

We can also say Steve has a wonderful sense of humor, right?

Carla Long 59:23

Absolutely does—he really does. You know, not knowing what the future holds could be considered scary probably for some people, but it should...it's not, it's not for me at least, knowing that God is in part of this process and that we are willing to take our time through this discernment process, fills me with a lot of hope and fills me with a lot of security that God is definitely leading this church. I really appreciate hearing your stories from the very beginnings of the church all the way up to now.

Is there something that you wish I would have asked or something thing that I missed that you wish I would have talked about?

Linda Booth 1:00:03

No, absolutely not. I think we've covered a lot of territory.

Carla Long 1:00:08

I think so too. Thank you so much, John and Lach and Linda, for your guidance and your wisdom and for sharing that knowledge with us.

John Wight 1:00:18

Thank you for having us.

Lachlan MacKay 1:00:20

Thanks, Carla.

Linda Booth 1:00:21

Blessings, everyone.

Josh Mangelson 1:00:24

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