

**Katie Langston** 00:16

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**Karin Peter** 01:00

Welcome to Cuppa Joe, a new series here at Project Zion Podcast, where we will be exploring the people, places, and events of restoration history. So pour yourself a cup of coffee, and say hello to our guide on this adventure, Community of Christ Director of Historic Sites, Apostle, and all around great guy, Lach Mackay. Hi, Lach.

**Lach Mackay**

Hello Karen.

**Karin Peter**

So you serve as the Director of Historic Sites for Community of Christ. Can you tell us what sites are part of your responsibility?

**Lach Mackay** 01:32

I can. Our sites include the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois, which happens to be where I live. We also have the Kirtland Temple in Kirtland, Ohio. I spent about 15 years there. The Plano Stone Church just outside of Chicago, Illinois in Plano. Joseph Smith III Liberty Hall in Lamoni, Iowa, and then Heritage Plaza in Independence, Missouri, which consists of the Frederick Madison Smith Study, as well as the Flourney House. Jones Flourney is the gentleman who sold the church the 63 acre Temple Lot in the 1830s.

**Karin Peter** 02:09

Okay. So some of those hopefully, we will be doing episodes on as we explore the restoration history. But it's interesting that today you're at Kirtland, which is one of the historic sites, and so we'll assume that the great, wonderful place in which you are residing at the moment will affect your sharing on our Cuppa Joe podcast today. So here on Cuppa Joe, we want to take an honest, and open, and, in your words, generous approach to the people and events that we're going to discuss. And the reality is some of us have a pretty easy time digesting information that might challenge our previous knowledge base, while others can really be sent reeling from what sounds like a complete contradiction to what they might have been taught about church history. So we want to be sensitively frank. That's my new slogan here, sensitively frank, which sounds like an oxymoron, but since you are sensitive, and I am frank, I think we can make this happen here. So let's start with talking about kind of our ground rules. In Community of Christ, we have some guidelines to assist our study of church history. And it helps us keep from acting in a reactionary manner and jumping to a place where if one thing is different than what we thought,

or one person turns out to be flawed in judgment, or one event is particularly disturbing, then everything must be wrong or bad or untrue, or flawed beyond redemption. And we don't want our discussions here on Cuppa Joe to be received in that manner. So what can church history principles. . . how can they help us to keep an open mind and generous spirit as we have these discussions?

**Lach Mackay** 04:06

Well, they can help in lots of ways. We have nine church history principles. These were drafted by President Steve Veazey a number of years ago, and they include:

Number one: That continuing our exploration of church history is a part of identity formation. As a church, we seek always to clarify our identity, message, and mission, and a people with a shared memory of their past, and an informed understanding of its meaning are better prepared to chart their way into the future.

Number two: History informs but does not dictate our faith and beliefs. We believe that studying history is not about proving or disproving mystical, spiritual, or revelatory experiences that birth or transform religious movements. Our understanding of our history affects our faith and beliefs. It does not, though, dictate our theology. So our past does not limit our faith and beliefs to what they were historically. A really concise way to say that is our history is not our theology.

Number three: We encourage honest, responsible historical scholarship. Studying history involves related fields. Historians use academic research to get as many facts as they can. They then interpret those facts to construct as clear a picture as possible of what was going on in the past. And this includes analyzing human culture to see how it affected events, meaning it's critically important to put things in context. We are strongly encouraged to avoid presentism. I see this happening all the time, especially online, presentism, or interpreting the past based on a current world view and culture, instead of the culture of the time. So another way to look at this one, again, I spent 15 years sharing Kirtland Temple with guests here, and I would fairly regularly walk them through these massive front doors into the temple. We'd stop in the outer court for the foyer, and we'd look up, and I would say, "Hey, what's wrong with this picture? Look at those chandeliers. Imagine those as candle burning chandeliers, they're electric now, these beautiful chandeliers hanging there. What's wrong with this picture if we were in the 1830s? Imagine them as candle burning chandeliers." I would say only about one in a hundred could figure out what was wrong. Of course, if we were in the 1830s, and you open those massive front doors, the wind would blow the candles out.

**Karen Peter**

Indeed.

**Lach Mackay**

They would never have installed candle burning chandelier is right in front of these massive front doors. But because of presentism, it was very rare that a guest could pick up on that. We

are so locked into our own time and place our own culture, our own context, that it's really hard to understand the world from the point of view of those in the past. And the way I see that often living out online, for example, I see discussions of Community of Christ position on African Americans and priesthood. Beginning in 1865, Joseph III came to the church with a revelatory document saying that we should continue the early practice of ordaining African Americans to priesthood offices. This was post Civil War America, just months after the war ended though. He also encouraged African Americans to offer ministry to other African Americans. Today, we're horrified by that. That's racist. Well, yeah, it is today. But this was 1865. It was really progressive at that point in time, and very brave. So we need to avoid presentism. We need to understand that event in the context of the 1860s in the US, not 2018 in the US. So that's my rant about presentism.

**Karin Peter** 08:14

Well, and the first statement that you made that studying history involves related fields, we have to have an understanding, a basic understanding of American history to really put the church history or restoration history in its appropriate context.

**Lach Mackay** 08:30

Definitely. That's something we've often not been great at in the past. We're doing a much better job today. But of course, the events of the restoration did not occur in a vacuum. We were very much influenced by what was going on around us. We've got to understand that, recognize that, build that in the equation.

**Karin Peter** 08:48

Okay, so other church history principles.

**Lach Mackay** 08:50

Number four: The study of church history is a continuing journey. Good historical inquiry understands that conclusions are open to correction as new understanding and information comes from ongoing study. So there's not just one telling frozen in time. It evolves. And the way I interpret Kirtland Temple for guest today is different than the way I interpreted it in 1993 when I got here, and that's okay. That's the way it should be. We're always learning there's always more sources available, always new interpretations, and that's appropriate and good.

**Karin Peter** 09:30

But this is where it gets a little sticky for people who heard one version, maybe when they were small, of church history, and now they think that the church is somehow telling a different story. So this principle can be very important.

**Lach Mackay** 09:45

I think you're right. I think it's the same story from a different perspective. But yes, I think you're right. Now, we'll probably talk about it, but because I wasn't raised with that understanding. I somehow either missed the cut off, or I think it more has to do with me who my parents were. Kind of ironically, I was raised in Independence, Missouri, and I'm a Joseph Smith Jr. and

Emma Smith descendant. So you think I would have got the very traditional version. I didn't. I was pretty open minded. My father's Australian. I think that international perspective had something to do with it. But I never had to unlearn the story and relearn it, which I'm grateful for. I know that can be a real struggle for some people.

**Karin Peter** 10:28

Well, and we're grateful for it as well. Okay, let's go on.

**Lach Mackay** 10:31

Number five: Seeing both the faithfulness and human flaws in our history makes it more believable and realistic, not less. Though, as historians we try not to judge. Instead, we try to understand by learning as much as possible about the context and the meaning of the words and actions of the time. And so the result of that is that we empathize with those in the past instead of judge. Our scriptures are consistent in pointing out that God for grace, uses imperfect people for needed ministry and leadership. A great example of this one, you know, in Community of Christ in the Reorganization, it would be easy to demonize Brigham Young because of his relationship with Emma, which at times, was very strained after Joseph Joseph Smith Jr.'s death, and what I thought was kind of an odd occurrence a few years back, the Brigham Young descendants apologized to the Joseph and Emma Smith family for the hurt that that their ancestor had caused. Which again, I thought was kind of silly. What I think is more effective is to come to understand the cause of the difficulty in that relationship. You know, Joseph was killed. I think about the three Ps. What's going to become the property and of the papers, Joseph's manuscripts for the scriptures, and then, of course, plural marriage. So I understand that that was a significant point of conflict as well. But Brigham was worried about feeding people as they crossed the plain. Emma is worried about feeding her children in Nauvoo. Those are both legitimate concerns. So as they squabbled about property and papers, I feel for both of them instead of judging them for their actions in the statements they made. I think that's a healthier and more helpful approach.

**Karin Peter**

Indeed.

**Lach Mackay**

Number six: The responsible study of church history involves learning, repentance, and transformation. A church with a mission focused on promoting communities of reconciliation, justice, and peace should be self-critical and honest about its history. This honesty prompts us to repent, and that strengthens our integrity. Admitting past mistakes helps us avoid repeating them and frees us from the influences of past injustices and violence in our history. This one can be really hard, to admit past mistakes. I can't help but think of Andrew Bolton at Haun's Mill where what we call the Haun's Mill Massacre took place on the anniversary of that event. Andrew was giving a talk. He was a former Apostle in Community of Christ, really focused on peace and justice. In this talk, he pointed out that Missouri in 1976 apologized for the extermination order which meant leave or we'll forcibly remove you. It didn't mean leave or we'll kill you. Leave or we'll forcibly remove you. In 1976, as that extermination order was rescinded,

Governor Bond apologized for Missouri's actions. Andrew pointed out at Haun's Mill that day that we, Latter Day Saints, have not apologized for the wrongs we committed in the Mormon War in Missouri. Notably things like inadvertently attacking the Missouri State Militia at the Battle of Crooked River. We thought this group was a mob, perhaps had been at times, but they were acting as as militiamen when we attacked to free some prisoners. Well, it's treason. So we've got to admit it, and apologize, and that frees us to move forward.

**Karin Peter** 14:17

So you're right. That is a really difficult one for people in Community of Christ. We have taken the position, historically, that we were the persecuted people, and that we had done no wrong and only wrong was done to us. But recently, someone I know, talked to me with this question, "What does it mean to reconcile or to help facilitate restorative justice when one party is both victim and victimizer?" Which I thought was an interesting question. In the historical context, when one is both the recipient of hurt and pain, but also has dealt hurt and pain to others. What does restorative justice look like?

**Lach Mackay** 15:04

Powerful question. I think that's why it's so critical. The only way you can do both is to approach these things openly, and honestly, and graciously, or non-threatening. It's not going to work if you don't.

**Karin Peter**

Okay.

**Lach Mackay** 15:21

Number seven: The church has a long standing tradition that it does not legislate or mandate positions on matters of church history. Historians should be free to draw their own conclusions after thorough consideration of the evidence. So there's not just one version, not one telling of the story.

Number eight: We need to create a respectful culture of dialogue about matters of history. We should not limit our faith story to one perspective. We welcome diverse viewpoints. They bring richness to the story. Finally,

Number nine: Our faith is grounded in God's revelation in Jesus Christ, and the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit. It must keep our hearts and mind centered on God's revelation of Jesus Christ. As God's word alive in human history, Jesus Christ was and is the foundation of our faith and the focus of the church's mission and message. So although I love history, I'm looking forward, not looking back, and always grounded in Jesus Christ.

**Karin Peter** 16:24

And so if people want to read the church history principles for themselves, they can find them on the cofchrist.org website under church history, but also can find them in *Sharing in Community*

*of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*, 3rd edition text. Just for reference for our listeners. So Lach, when I was growing up in what was then the RLDS church, I was taught a rather condensed and sanitized version of our history as truth. This is the true story. And it was taught to me as more of a theological premise than history, and you mentioned that in the principles as we talked about them. So the way that I experienced it was this, for example, Joseph Smith founded the one and only true church because all others were in apostasy. Now, this is a theological premise, and it's not a particularly sound theological premise, but it is a theological promise, nonetheless. And so it's not surprising that people of my generation and prior to my generation get a little confused about the relationship between history and theology. So how has Community of Christ been able to begin to reframe our story as history and help people understand that it's not our theology? It's one thing to have a principle. It's another thing to actually engage in the process. What does that look like?

**Lach Mackay** 17:56

So I think part of that probably comes because we were able eventually to move on from kind of the one true church position. And I don't know, it'd be kind of fun to look at Max Weber's, you know, the kind of cult dissected denomination transition of how religious bodies work. So was that our transition from sect to denomination, when we were finally able to start looking at our story, not through the doctrinal lens, but the history lens? That probably has something to do with it. But I think that probably the new Mormon history beginning in the 1960s, the application of professional historical methodologies to the church story, probably played a critical role in that as well. So there's a couple of ways that that church historians could respond to new Mormon history. We could reject it, not be welcoming, or we could be open to it. And Community of Christ, we chose, and it was halting, but we chose to be open. And at times, we would take two steps forward and one back, but I think that was just critical in the process by engaging in new Mormon history, by engaging in discussions with those outside of Community of Christ or the RLDS tradition, and even outside of Latter Day Saint traditions, that was critically important as well. So I probably can't overstate the role of new Mormon history in that process.

**Karin Peter** 19:33

Can you say a little bit more about what new Mormon history is for some of our listeners for whom that term might be unfamiliar?

**Lach Mackay** 19:43

So the idea is that you're not using the story as a tool, but you're really starting to explore and try and learn from. It's more open, more professional, willing to admit mistakes. So it's kind of the professionalization of the history process. So some would argue Fawn Brody and *No Man Knows My History*, some would say is the first expression of that. Maybe, Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* in the mid 1960s. That was my introduction, I guess to it, but just critically important, and we're still seeing the impact of the professionalization of church history. And through again, in our context, what was called new Mormon history, that's still playing out in the Latter-day Saint tradition churches today.

**Karin Peter** 20:37

So what are the current hot topics, if you will, in the study of restoration history,

**Lach Mackay** 20:44

So I guess I'm kind of tired of this one. But plural marriage, polygamy comes up again, and again, and again. And again,

**Karin Peter** 20:52

The gift that keeps on giving.

**Lach Mackay** 20:54

Yeah. And that is a very difficult one. Joseph, always publicly denounced plural marriage or polygamy and denied involvement. It's gets pretty clear that he was privately involved while publicly denouncing. Also, and I know, you can build lots of different positions. But I think there's decent evidence to suggest that Joseph prior to his death, decided it was not a good idea, and was trying to figure out how to extricate himself. But I respect, I realized that rational people can reach different conclusions on that topic. But I really would like to see us move beyond that discussion. We seem to be stuck there. In Community of Christ, we really need to move into the 20th century, we've been kind of stuck in the 19th century. So the international expansion of the church is what there's growing interest in growing research on as well as the RLDS church's or the Community of Christ church's engagement with a larger Christian community, beginning in the 1960s. And on both of those areas that we're really started to explore now.

**Karin Peter** 22:03

So one of the future episodes that we have lined up is with David Ettinger up in Omaha, who is going to share with us a little bit about the church going into Africa when his father served in the Council of Twelve. So that's part of that 20th century expression of the church. So other other hot topics, or maybe just topics of interest for you. What are the topics that right now that you feel like you'd like to spend some more time studying?

**Lach Mackay** 22:32

So I kind of have started to shift my focus as I've moved into the Council of Twelve for Community of Christ. I'm becoming more and more interested in things like the peace gene. You know, I've done a fair amount of work in recent years on kind of what was there early as a focus on peace 1830, 31, 32, but kind of overwhelmed by this frontier culture of violence in Jackson County in northern Missouri. So there really was a significant peace emphasis in the earliest years of the church, but it got lost in Independence and Far West, Missouri, and kind of extinguished almost in Nauvoo, but reclaimed by Joseph Smith III.

**Karin Peter** 23:17

So this might be a good time to mention that you co-authored a text, and *In Pursuit of Peace* that traces this peace gene, as you call it, with several other authors. And that text is available through Herald House. Is it on Amazon as one of our Amazon Smile texts?



**Lach Mackay 23:39**

That I do not know.

**Karin Peter 23:41**

All right, we get it from Heraldhouse.org. And look for *In Pursuit of Peace*. And I've used it extensively in some of the work that we've done in editing resources for people as they explore our history of peace.

**Lach Mackay 24:00**

A big jump from peace to intoxicants.

**Karin Peter 24:03**

Oh, my. Okay.

**Lach Mackay 24:05**

That is another area that I've been particularly interested in and done a fair amount of research, but there's clearly more to do. Intoxicants in the 1830s, and the interaction of church members and leaders with them, which, of course, was very different than it would become later. So I kind of frame that through Community of Christ's focus on responsible choices, and so been surprised at what temperance meant. I guess I shouldn't have been, but it was not prohibition. It wasn't abstinence in the 1830s. It was moderation. And it's been kind of interesting to trace that in the 1830s and 40s, to in Community of Christ, pretty much prohibition at least for priesthood members, but then see that evolution back to focus on responsible choices. A lot more work to do there. But peace and intoxicants are what I've spent the most time on lately.

**Karin Peter 25:04**

I feel several Cuppa Joe interviews in the works here. I made notes intoxicants, and the peace gene. So we'll be sharing some more together. You mentioned earlier, that part of responsible study is the relationship we have with other historians. So who are some of the historians from either other denominations or other areas of study with whom we collaborate?

**Lach Mackay 25:33**

So we'll collaborate with anybody who's interested in doing open and honest scholarship and work closely with, for example, the Joseph Smith Paper scholars, with the LDS church, working at times with those coming out of Disciples traditions. So anybody who might have an interest that overlaps, we're interested in working with, sharing resources. The dialogue is just critically important. We are all better if we discuss and engage with the larger history community,

**Karin Peter 26:07**

A bigger pool of information, a bigger pool of perspective.



So throughout the history of Community of Christ, we've always had one single appointed official historian who records for posterity all that is worthwhile to note in Community of Christ. So at this juncture here in 2018, who is the official historical voice Community of Christ.

**Lach Mackay 26:34**

So what I love about Community of Christ is that we really don't have, and I would argue, haven't had one official historical voice, meaning if one person says it, it's the official position of the church. It's often perceived that way, but the church does not take positions on historical matters. We support good scholarship wherever that leads us. And so we do have church historians, but the fact that we have three of them now reflects the fact that we don't think there's only one way to tell the story. There's not just one official version. So our world church historians at the moment, again, there's three of them. Barbara Walden, who also is the Executive Director for the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation. Ron Romig, recently retired as the Kirtland Temple Director and for many years archivists for that. David Howlett, who's an amazingly bright young scholar who's done great work on Kirtland Temple and contested religious space. So three voices serving as World Church Historian at the moment.

**Karin Peter 27:45**

So those are great names for people to Google on the Community of Christ website and learn a little bit more about church history and how it continues to be an important part of how we understand our story and our journey going forward. So we've covered the principles that are guidelines for us in studying church history and talked about some hot topics kind of of the day. Are there any closing thoughts regarding what we hope, what you might hope Cuppa Joe will provide in the arena of podcasting and restoration history?

**Lach Mackay 28:19**

So just to recap, we want to be open and honest and gracious, or non-threatening. We want to avoid presentism, which is not easy. But I'm seeing a lot of presentism out there. The other thing that I see a lot of, and I hope we can avoid, and maybe help people work through, I have discovered that if you have kind of a right and wrong or black and white worldview, and it develops cracks, then it all crumbles, then it all falls apart, and it's all rejected. Well, I believe that our reality is not black and white. Life takes place in the gray. And so I think it's really important to help people understand that that's okay. That's the way it is for us, and that's the way it has been for our ancestors. And that's what we'll discover as we explore the story of those who've gone before.

**Karin Peter 29:17**

Wonderful. Well, I'm looking forward to it. And so this is the point where I hope we can interact with some of our listeners, because here is where Lach and I invite you the listener to submit your restoration history topics of interest. You can go to [projectzionpodcast.org](http://projectzionpodcast.org) and select contact from the drop down menu, and send us an email with Cuppa Joe in the subject line. And we'll see if we can explore your topic on a future episode. So with that, I'll say thank you Lach until next time, and for now, I'm Karin Peter, this is Cuppa Joe. Thanks for listening

**Josh Mangelson 30:05**

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