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Project Zion Podcast

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.

Karin Peter 00:33

Welcome, this is "Cuppa Joe", where we explore Restoration history, and I'm your host, Karin Peter. Now here at "Cuppa Joe", we partner with the Historic Sites Foundation to interview the presenters from their spring and fall Lecture Series, and today's episode is part of the Fall 2022 Historic Sites Lecture Series. So, our guest for today's conversation is Steve Shields. Now, his bio is, is Steven L. Shields and part of me wants to ask what L is for but I'll wait and do that after we, we finish. Steven L. Shields, a retired Community of Christ world church appointee was the founding president of the East Asia Mission Center and leader of the Church's work in Korea from 1996 to 2004. He is a past president of the John Whitmer Historical Association, and is currently the president of the Royal Asiatic Society, Korea. He writes historical and op ed columns for the *Korea Times* in Seoul, and he serves as a high priest in Community of Christ as he divides his time between Seoul, Korea and the United States, at least when pandemic restrictions are not in place. So, with that, welcome, Steve.

Steve Shields 02:01

I'm glad to be here. Thank you, Karin.

Karin Peter 02:03

It's, glad to see you on, on my screen, although we're just recording audio today. But I want to thank you for joining us at what is really an early time for you and I appreciate your sacrifice to get up and drink your coffee, which is perfect for our theme here at *Project Zion* while we have our conversation. So, your contribution to this fall's Historic Sites Foundation Lecture Series is titled, "Divergent Paths of the Community of Christ: The Past 100 years", and sometimes in kind of the history context of Community of Christ, when we start talking about divergent paths, our minds go all the way back to Nauvoo and the secession crisis and all the divergent paths that happened there, but this is a different situation that we're talking about, much more current. And so, in the description of your lecture, you talked about that, "From its inception, the notion that God could speak to ordinary people set the stage for a history of ever emerging alternate viewpoints, and schisms." And, specifically, you highlight schisms from the past 100 years of Community of Christ, beginning with, in your description, Fred M. Smith and what is known as Supreme Directional Control, and, that was in the 1920s, and then Wallace B. Smith's 1984 revelation in the Community of Christ *Doctrine and Covenants* section 156, which made the provision for the ordination of women, and those are indeed serious topics when we talk about disagreement in Community of Christ. So first, I wanted to ask you. Why were a century of schisms and disruptions a topic that even interested you to develop a lecture around?

Steve Shields 04:04

Well, for the past 50 years I've been exploring the divergent paths, and my, my book called *Divergent Paths of the Restoration* was issued just last year in an ebook edition, fifth edition, and the print edition came out this fall. So, I've been looking at all of these, the vociferous tendency of the movement for most, well, from my teenage years until now. The, the book in its current edition, in the fifth edition, lists about 500 different expressions of the movement. Most of those can be categorized into six main family groupings, I'll call them, one of which is Community of Christ. And so, the lecture specifically focuses on Community of Christ as opposed to the whole nine yards. The Community of Christ movement has had two major upheavals, as we mentioned already, where there was some significant disruption. During Joseph Smith III's time as the second president of the Church, there were very few dissenting, there were some dissenting people, but the groups never really coalesced with too many, you know, very few people. A lot of it's just a numbers problem. The Community of Christ midwest saints movement, as some have called it, has always had smaller numbers than the Utah direction. So, you know, if you, if you do 10%, you know, dissident, you know, you've got a lot fewer numbers in Community of Christ. The last 100 years, since Supreme Directional Control until now, the two major disruptions were really significant. 1000s of people left for other pursuits in their faith journey. In the '20s, several 1000 people of, of Community of Christ membership, including a couple of apostles, jumped ship, and went to several different other directions. In the 1980s, when President Wallace B. Smith issued what's now section 156, we lost another several 1000 people who, rather than going to something else that was around, organized many of their own faith communities, we'll call them. So modern history, if 100 years can be called modern, has some very different tones to it than the earlier history of the Church. Neither one is more important than the other, but I think looking at the Community of Christ journey specifically, is, it's interesting. It's interesting to see how Community of Christ's focus on democracy, democratic government, has allowed really more of a forum for that sort of dissent than a lot of the other denominations that make up the overall movement.

Karin Peter 07:53

So, let's talk a little bit about some of the schisms that you cover in your lecture, and maybe you can just give us a, kind of an overview for folks who are going to view your lecture when it's in the archives on the *Historic Sites Foundation* website. But let's talk about them a little bit. If there's more than the two that you mentioned with Fred M. Smith, and then what, section 156, we can throw those in there as well, but tell us a bit about this century of schisms.

Steve Shields 08:22

Well, the Supreme Directional Control situation started in the 19 teens. And Richard C. Evans was one of the prime movers and shakers in those days. Evans was Canadian, was kind of a teenage, young adult prodigy in the Church. He was a gifted public speaker, had great charisma. I remember reading an account of a preaching series that he did in Toronto, and they had to rent a theater because of the crowds, and the theater seated 2000 people, and they still had standing room only to hear him preach about Mormonism. So that, you know, so called.

Karin Peter 09:12

I think we have, for our listeners, we have on, it might be in the archives on the Historic Site Lectures, but an, in *Project Zion Podcast*, I think John Hamer did an episode on R.C. Evans. I can refer people to that.

Steve Shields 09:27

Right, right. But Evans and Fred M. Smith had been appointed as counselors to Joseph Smith III, late in Joseph Smith III's life. Evans, I think, believed that he would be called as the next president of the Church, and when Fred M. was designated, Evans resigned from the First Presidency, and was appointed as Bishop of Canada, still, you know, in the Church, but that only lasted for a short time. Once Fred M. became president of the Church, Evans became his nemesis, and it didn't take too long for Evans to persuade most of the Church members in Toronto to follow him. And so, in 1918, they organized the Church of the Christian Brotherhood. And the, he, Evans was strongly democratic, compared with Fred M.'s very, what's the word I want to call it? I hate to use the word dictatorial control, but, but it leaned that way. And that came out then, a few years later, when officially, President Fred M. Smith introduced to the conference, what was I think an unfortunate choice of terminology, Supreme Directional Control, at a time when we saw the rise of fascism in Europe. And so, I think I understand what Fred was trying to do. I understand, you know, he was trying to say, look, I'm president of the Church. I'm the prophet of the Church. The president-prophet has the final say in doctrinal interpretation, scriptural interpretation and the direction of the Church. And you had, in his time, almost three separate churches: the Church of the presiding bishopric, the Church of the twelve apostles, and then the First Presidency. And so, he saying, no, it needs to be unified under this one umbrella with the focus, and with a direction, and with a message that moves us forward rather than competing with each other, these different leadership groups. And to someone like R.C. Evans, and later others, where the democratic, you know, the voice of the people was so powerfully strong, that, there was a backlash. And, you know, Evans pulled off probably the first major, in any of the Smith-Rigden movement, the first major opposing Church body in the 20th century, in modern times. And he, he was masterful at organizing. He was masterful at the democratic process. His charisma and preaching made him quite successful in persuading people. They, they had a church building in Toronto which, they had a stained-glass windows with a stained glass of Joseph Smith Jr., and Joseph Smith III, and R.C. Evans as the, the Holy Trinity, so to speak. Later years, the church, the Evans Church sold that church building to Community of Christ and the new owners took out the R.C. Evans panel of the stained-glass window and replaced it with a black piece of glass. The Evan's...

Karin Peter 13:20

Ouch.

Steve Shields 13:27

...Church built the new church in the, in the '60s, I think it was, and, and, but without Evans, without that dynamic process, it eventually, you know, went, kind of went downhill and then their new church building was sold to Community of Christ. And a good colleague of mine and his wife were married in that building when it was later a Community of Christ church. And over the years that particular neighborhood, and the dynamics of the church shifting, and Toronto property was sold, and think a senior citizens housing project or something was built on the site. But anyway, that, you know, R.C.

Evans' group lasted for 50-60 years, and he was only, he died three years after the church was started. He died in 1921. And so, there was enough gumption going. Well, and that's about when we start seeing the movement in Independence under Fred M. Smith, for having the First Presidency, the president of the Church, specifically giving the direction to the Church. And most of us in Community of Christ today don't think it's a big issue for the president, you know, prophet-president of the Church to be giving those kinds of Supreme Directional Control things to us. Although in chatting with one of our recent presidents he said, "Doesn't matter that I'm president of the Church, nobody does what I asked them to do anyway."

Karin Peter 15:11

Well, I think we would object more to this, Steve, if it was labeled Supreme Directional Control, right?

Steve Shields 15:16

I think so.

Karin Peter 15:18

Right.

Steve Shields 15:19

But, you know, I mean, the point being is that we still have a lot of the democratic process, despite what Fred M. did, and you know, it's a, it's a very different church today than it was in 1924-'25, when all of this was going on. So, Evans is kind of laying the groundwork. We get to '24-'25, when the official proposal to the World Conference is made. We, as a denomination, had made an agreement with the Church of Christ on the Temple Lot, which is right across the street, in Independence, that if a person's original baptism and ordination was done under the original Church priesthood authority, and, that we could just shift membership without any rebaptism, or even confirmation. And they'd already been doing, recognizing communion with each other. And at that time, the Church of Christ on the Temple Lot had about 100 members. Community of Christ, of course, had 10s of 1000s of members. And when the Supreme Directional Control thing blew up, at least 3000 Community of Christ people simply took their membership cards and walked across the street and joined the Temple Lot Church. And two of them were apostles, members of the twelve, a couple of bishops, and, you know, dozens of other, high priests and you know, priesthood members of all walks of life. And suddenly, the Church of Christ Temple Lot went from 100 members to 3000 members overnight. When they moved ahead and decided to organize a Council of Twelve in 1926-'27, I think it was, they did a quorum, a quorum of twelve is seven, the quorum meaning majority. So, the proper term for the 12 apostles is Council of Twelve. It's a quorum when you have at least seven members, and with that majority, you can conduct business. So, of the seven new apostle, or, yeah, seven new apostles, one was a heritage community, Church of Christ Temple Lot member who had been the president of their Church, and they got rid of the First Presidency, and put, and put in a 12 apostle structure. Six of them were former Community of Christ high priests.

Karin Peter 18:07

Wow.

Steve Shields 18:07

And so, that, that, when you lose two of your 12 apostles, who don't just walk away and become who knows what, but who take with them the whole heritage of the movement, and basically give steam to what became, Temple Lot Church had never been a really big opposing body, but now it became an opposition body...

Karin Peter 18:34

Sure.

Steve Shields 18:35

... because of all these Community of Christ people who were anti-Supreme Directional Control, and so that whole thing comes out of getting rid of a First Presidency, and put in place a committee of twelve. And they also put in another structure where there was only, there were only seven bishops. So, there could only be seven bishops to give direction, rather than a presiding bishopric, which modeled the First Presidency. So, there's a, there was this Council of Bishops. The seven bishops idea is modeled on Acts when the first seven deacons were ordained to deal with the temporal issues of the early Christians. So that's where the model comes from, is right out of the New Testament, and the Temple Lot Church, more than Community of Christ at that same time, was really trying to model on the New Testament, and when you look at the New Testament, you don't see a First Presidency. You don't see a presiding bishopric. You see 12 apostles, and seven deacons. So, they really tried to model and say, you know, here's the precedent. And it worked well for a couple of years for them, until they began to experience their own disruption in Temple Lot Church. Community of Christ moved on from that. The folks that were of that opposition persuasion, one former apostle, T.W. Williams, started a protest group, which evolved into a full church organization. They built what was called the Kansas Street Church, which has long been gone. It was torn down in the '60s, I think. But if we were to look on the street map where that building was located, it's right about where the circle drive in the Temple is, would have been just north of that circle drive right in that area there. And the, the protest group, which became the Church of Jesus Christ that built that building, they had an open pulpit. They let anybody come and preach. They were really democratic. I mean, it was just 180 degrees from Fred M. Smith, even though we still had the World Conference in Community of Christ, where we were voting on things and doing simple majority rule, in most cases, the pulpits of the Williams group were wide open, and they let anybody preach, and they, they went on for a few years. When there was a major disruption in the Temple Lot Church, the group that walked out, went just across the street to the Kansas Street Church to have their own meetings. And, you know, so all in that little three, four block area, there's been a lot of interesting historical activity that you don't, you only see the remnants of that with the Temple Lot Church building, with the Stone Church, Auditorium, Temple, and then the LDS Visitor Center and the Stake Center. But that, that history of disruptions and tents erected on the lawn at the Temple Lot Church to accommodate conferences and things, are long in the past. So, we don't really see that. The Kansas Street Church and those whole blocks of areas have been wiped out, when, when they built the Temple and before there was a big parking lot there. So, you know, that much of that history has been erased. So that was a really huge time of upheaval, and, and placed between the two World Wars. You know, it was a time of incredible change in the geopolitics of the world and the United States. In many respects, when you look at the socio-economic history of the United States, the 20th century didn't begin till, till the end of World War I, even though we've been going for, you know,

18 years. You look at the, the economic development and things like that, we, we hadn't shifted out of kerosene lanterns and horses and buggies a whole lot until the industrialization that took place for the war effort in World War I. And then when we get to World War II, that's even more extensive industrialization. And more and more women joined the workforce because men were overseas fighting. And they did find out that Rosie could rivet an airplane together, surprisingly. They thought she could only bake cookies. So that marks a significant shift in the mindset of people and their awareness. And so, by the 1940s, despite what was happening in Germany with Hitler and all of the fascism, Community of Christ moved on from that, and, and, you know, President Fred M. Smith got what he needed and trying to give a concerted, you know, single minded direction to where the Church was heading. When you look at Fred M.'s sections in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, they're all rather bland. There's not a lot of counsel. It's simply, mostly so and so is called to be an apostle, so and so is called to be presiding bishop, whatever. So, he was really focused on organizational matters and getting the institution put together in a way that could move forward. So, unlike his father and grandfather, who had lots of theological ideas, Fred M. wasn't much of a theological thinker in, in those sections of the *Doctrine and Covenants*. There was a strong theology that undergirded all of that, I think, and that was shaped by his philosophy, training and that kind of thing too. So, he was the first educated leader of the Church when it comes to book learning.

Karin Peter 25:05

Right.

Steve Shields 25:05

And it had been shaped at an east coast institution. We can, that's another story there. But, you know, he was quite an intellectual giant, not that his father and grandfather hadn't contributed lots of that, but you know, and then his younger brother, Israel, was a lawyer, you know, highly educated lawyer. Israel sat on the Constitutional Convention in Missouri when they rewrote the state constitution, and served in the presiding bishopric for a while. So, you suddenly had the generation of education coming in, and that's, so the 20th century starts in 1918. And more and more, since that time, the Church has put a high value on educating leaders as much as reasonably possible, looking at educated people for different, the skill sets they could bring to an increasingly internationally based organization. So, that whole Supreme Directional Control controversy, over the 20 some years, shaped and gave foundation to what the Church then moved on to be.

Karin Peter 26:29

So, I'm fascinated as you talk about Fred M. and some of the other aspects of that time. He had, he had conflicts with numerous people, besides R.C. Evans.

Steve Shields 26:41

Oh yeah, that was, yeah, one...

Karin Peter 26:44

But, but you can see part of that in, in the difficulty, I think, that the Church had regarding education and intellectualism in the Church, coming from a tradition that did not value that in the past.

Steve Shields 26:58

Right.

Karin Peter 26:59

Yeah, absolutely. Although some of my favorite Fred M. stories have to do with Marietta Walker, who I guess would get after him on a regular basis during this same time period, so.

Steve Shields 27:10

She was a very strong personality, but she also knew what she was talking about.

Karin Peter 27:15

Yes, absolutely.

Steve Shields 27:16

Yup, yup.

Karin Peter 27:17

So again, I'll point our listeners, we have numerous episodes in "Cuppa Joe", that either discuss Fred M. I think there's one that Andrew Bolton did about his perspective on armed conflict versus F. Henry Edwards' perspective, which is good too. All right, so there's one...

Steve Shields 27:38

There's one.

Karin Peter 27:38

...which is a pretty big one. We still in Community of Christ kind of laugh periodically about, oh, you know, something comes up that we don't like it and we go, "Oh, Supreme Directional Control" and we kind of, you know, "ha ha" about it. So, it still lives in our memory.

Steve Shields 27:50

You know, it's still alive. And I think the, the president of the Church, regardless of who it happens to be at the moment, have struggled with wanting, you know, having a vision of where the Church could be headed, what we could be doing, and yet not getting the conference to go along with it. Now, it's very rare that we reject a piece of legislation from the First Presidency, but it's only because the presidency works really hard to make it less provocative, I suppose.

Karin Peter 28:29

Yeah, yeah.

Steve Shields 28:30

And every now and again, something comes out in, in a document that ends up in the *Doctrine and Covenants* that is provocative and, and does cause a lot of concern, and of course, that's what happened to Wallace B. Smith in 19-, 1986, with, no, 1980-...

Karin Peter 28:53

'84.

Steve Shields 28:54

...'84, with 156, thank you, where it's almost an offhand side remark, when you read the text. It's, you know, there's people in the priesthood that are using it for self-aggrandizement, we're going to build the temple, and oh, by the way, don't be surprised that some women are being called to priesthood offices. And it's like, wait a minute, what?

Karin Peter 29:22

The temple and the other aspects of tithing and different things in 156, never got really unpacked.

Steve Shields 29:30

Nobody ever unpacked those because it focused on that, and oh, by the way, don't be surprised.

Karin Peter 29:35

Well, let's talk about that one, unless there's something in between there.

Steve Shields 29:39

Well, well, there is a foundation to it.

Karin Peter 29:41

All right.

Steve Shields 29:42

As we emerge from Fred M. Smith's time, Israel A. Smith comes onto the scene as the successor. He's a younger brother of Fred M. and Israel has a, I think a real genuine pastoral sense of his role as prophet-president of the Church. And he launches almost, well, when I say almost immediately, it's two or three years within becoming Church president, he believes that it would be important for visits to the worldwide Church. And so, he does tours of Europe. He goes to Tahiti and Hawaii, and then of course throughout the United States and does a lot of traveling, so that there's the, we're pre-internet, barely, almost barely television era. But he believes that the personal contact is critically important. And so, he spends a lot of time traveling. Now, he wasn't a young man when he became president of the Church, he was in his 60s already, and travel in those days, even by air, was less than comfortable. You know, early air, yeah, well, I say early, it's not early, but airplane travel in the '50s, we're still dealing with propeller things and it would take, you know, hours and hours and hours and hours to get from LA to Hawaii. Now it takes four and a half by jet. It would take 8,10, 12 hours sometimes. Listening to Alan Tyree's story of how they went to Tahiti in 1953, and they had to go from here to there, to there, to there, to back there. It took them seven days to get there because there were no direct flights.

Karin Peter 31:38

Right.

Steve Shields 31:38

And so, I can imagine, in 1951, Israel went to Tahiti, it was a similar kind of a thing. And, you know, even younger people, air travel today, as fast and as modern as it is, it's a drain when you're on an airplane for three or four, or seven, or like me, between San Francisco and Seoul is 12 hours, and that's after I've gotten up at four in the morning to get to the airport where my son lives, to get to the plane, to get to San Francisco, to get the direct flight to Seoul. So, so you know, it's, it's, it's not easy on the body. So, I can only imagine how tough that might have been for Israel, and give him great credit for wanting to go do that. And he gets to Tahiti, and the, lots of Church, 1000s of Church members in Tahiti. They have a huge conference at a town called Taravao, which is on the isthmus between Big Tahiti Island and Little Tahiti Island. There, we have a huge Church congregation there and a big property. They had kind of a camping kind of a reunion sort of a conference when he was there. And while he's at the conference, several of the elders say, "President Smith, we want to talk about gathering to Zion." That had become a really huge theme during the war years.

Karin Peter 33:09

Yes, it had.

Steve Shields 33:11

It still is in many Church members' memories and thinking. They said, but, but we're fishermen. There's no sea in Independence. How would we eat? Oh, you say get jobs, but what's, what jobs could we get? We have no skills. We know how to fish. They're not, they weren't farmers. They, there, there wasn't farming of any, I mean, there was a little bit of stuff, but not much in Tahiti, and they spoke French and Tahitian, not English. And so, there were lots of questions that they raised with President Israel. So how does this work for us? You know, they're believers, they believe in the Church wholeheartedly and its mission. So, he says, well, let me, let me pray about that. He issued a revelation in the next day or two, that, we have the handwritten copy in the archives. I've seen it. It's just, it's marvelous to see those kinds of things from the historical document perspectives but written on a basically legal pad paper and a pencil. And he, he basically gives them a revelation that gathering to Zion does not necessarily mean moving to Independence, but gathering in places where people are in community and creating Zion in their own place. So, Tahitian saints, you don't have to move to the US. You can create Zion right here in Taravao or in Papeete, or Mo'orea or wherever, and you should do that. You should, you know, people should come where they can get to church and be nearby, and of course the Church in, in French Polynesia today, every, almost every island and atoll has a Community of Christ congregation on it where people are creating those kinds of communities. Well, that gets back to Independence, and there were some difficult times with some of the other leaders of the Church. How dare you change the doctrine of the Church? He said, "Well, I'm not about not changing anything, I'm just finding a way to make Zion bigger than just Jackson County." It never was ever presented to the World Conference for inclusion in the *Doctrine and Covenants* and I don't know why. There's only speculation about that. But it was, it had an impact on what was happening in the next 10, 12 years.

Karin Peter 35:48

Absolutely.

Steve Shields 35:50

We get into 1960s and Church leaders are saying, you know, our doctrine's out of sync with a worldwide mission of Christ. Charles Neff was one of the primary voices but he wasn't the only one. He and, was it Blair Jensen, I think, had come to Asia in the mid '50s to explore missional possibilities. We'd already had baptisms in Korea. That was the first place in Asia we had baptisms was here in Korea, 1954. Japan followed the next year with some baptisms. And people were gathering here and in Korea. They were gathering in Japan, saying we need missionaries, we need Church literature, we need, and Neff and Jensen looked at what the Church literature was, and it was completely not helpful. You know, all the literature said, we're the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, not the Mormons, and nobody here even knew what Mormon was in those days. You know, so it just, what does all this mean? And that began the shift in how the Church started looking at itself, and the Basic Beliefs Committee was set up back in the '60s, and they did a whole series of essays in the *Herald*, as they explored and tried to find what were the basic, I'll use today's term for what they were trying to do, Enduring Principles of who we are as a people and what we believe, and how we interpret scripture. And so that really laid the foundation for what happens in the '80s. We move pretty slowly in our Church, but I think slow is not always bad. There's some times when I think most of us get frustrated with how slow we do move, and even right to the top levels, but, but because the democratic process is so important, you can't but move more slowly. The, the ordinary Church member who is working in the State Farm Insurance office, or still working on their farm, they're not reading all these books and doing all this study, and it doesn't mean they're not intelligent, it just means they've got a job to go to, and despite this idea of a nine to five job, I don't know of anybody who works, who really only works nine to five. It doesn't work that way. It's not that easy to turn on and turn off unless you work for the federal government, at least for federal employees but, but, you know, organizations like that are very strict about, you know, it's five o'clock, you need to go home, and you don't take your work home. My sister worked for the federal government her whole career.

Steve Shields 39:06

And, but, you know, when you're dealing with Church people, who have their mind on other things, who are faithful people, when these new intellectual ideas come out, it takes a while to get your head wrapped around them. Or, remember early on, when we started doing the Master of Arts in Religion program, a Church member said, "Well, I don't know why we need to use those Methodist teachers. We know more about the Bible than they ever will because we have revelation. And you don't need to read all those books, you just have revelation." Well, that's, that's the, that was the idea. And that gets back to that opening statement of anybody can get to God. It's not restricted to this few narrow people. A few, you know, Joseph Smith had struggles with it because by the time they got to Kirtland, just a year after the Church is organized, there were people cropping up all over giving revelations and getting things through seer stones and whatever. And Joseph says, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. That's not really what I meant. Because, even Joseph Smith could see that we weren't moving ahead...

Karin Peter 40:14

Yeah.

Steve Shields 40:14

... in the same direction, different. And even today, we look at the, the religious world, the spiritual world around us, and well, God told me X, Y, Z. And well, no, God didn't tell me that. God told me A, B, C. So, it's a two-edged sword, when you say, God's accessible to all, when it's really an interpretation of God that comes out of the mouth, rather than the other.

Karin Peter 40:46

Yeah, and that's still alive, in the Church. I mean, I, I've been in many places where people have either outright stated, or have alluded to the fact that you know, it may, Church leaders may say this, but until God tells them personally, they're not going to believe it. It's that kind of a perspective.

Steve Shields 41:03

A few years back, I was teaching a class on scripture, a Temple School class on scripture in the United States, and the pastor of the congregation was a strong believer in the historicity of the *Book of Mormon*, and at every turning point, "Well, God told me you're wrong." It was not a very positive weekend experience for that Temple School class, because she had a better God than I did. And, and it left the rest of the class members quite confused. You know, here's Steve, coming from Church headquarters with the Temple School class, which is the official curriculum for leadership training and development, but yet, our pastor here, you know, she's a good person, and you know, she's a spiritual person, and, you know, we've trusted her, and, you know, just, oh, my gosh. It was, I think that was the last Temple School class I ever taught.

Karin Peter 42:11

But that's a really good ...

Steve Shields 42:13

It was hard.

Karin Peter 42:13

... example of, of what happens to a greater scale, whether it's R.C. Evans in, in Toronto, or whether it's the reaction to Supreme Directional Control. That, that kind of conflict on, on whose voice is authoritative for the Church has always been present within the movement that became Community of Christ.

Steve Shields 42:34

Yeah.

Karin Peter 42:35

Absolutely.

Steve Shields 42:35

So, in the '60s, we had these essays on basic beliefs. There was a committee, they were, you know, top ranked Church leaders, 12 apostles and member of the Presidency, people that were trusted; F. Henry Edwards, Charles Neff, Clifford Cole. These are names from history, and some may not recognize those names, but in the '60s, they were some of the key members of the twelve and First

Presidency. I don't, and I don't have the whole list of the committee in my, in the back of my mind, but they worked hard on exploring and learning and consulting with people from the broader Christian community, mostly Protestant community. We had some really good resources available in the Kansas City area with, with the St. Paul School of Theology, which was the United Methodist Church's, one of their seminaries, and some other resources there. And, you know, they took full advantage of all of the best of, you know, Christian scholarship that was readily available. And this group put together these essays, which became published as a single volume book in 1970, called *Exploring the Faith*. It's difficult reading, and when I first began exploring membership in the Church in the late '70s, early '80s, I read that book, and it left me a little bit, it's like, wow, I, I can't understand this. It wasn't written in common people's language. And Alan Tyree, who was a member of the First Presidency later on, tried to do a, what should we call it, a, a revised standard version of the book, a little bit more accessible to common readers, and I think he was successful in getting to that point. But by the time that book came out, we were well past that *Exploring the Faith* stuff and we'd moved on, and we'd moved on in some significant ways. President W. Wallace Smith, who led the Church in the late '50s, through the '60s and into the '70s, had a vision for the Temple and started that process quite early in his presidency. It took 20 years to get to the point of section 156, or 20 years or there about. W. Wallace said, it's now time to begin thinking about this. And his son, Wallace B. Smith said, it's time to do it. And quite, how can I say this? I don't, I think having everyone in the priesthood is important for our Church; male, female, non-binary, whomever. We need all of that perspective, all of that color. So, 156 is important in that regard. But the whole idea of this culmination of 100 years of history of building the Temple in Zion, in Independence, has some long-term impact on the Church, I think. It certainly has had a financial impact on the Church...

Karin Peter 46:14

Yeah.

Steve Shields 46:15

...and unfortunately, not a real positive impact. It's been a real struggle for us to get the bills paid sometimes. And we've been lucky to have, in the presiding bishopric and the First Presidency, people that have been moving us forward with that. Modest goals, but goals that can be met have been really important. But I don't, even 25 years on, I don't think we still are utilizing the Temple to its fullest vision. It's, it's, it's a great focus. You know, it's a focal point for the worldwide ministries of the Church. And, you know, we've tried all kinds of worship ways there and they're doing some, I'm not sure about campfires on the plaza, but, because I don't like the smell of wood smoke.

Karin Peter 47:12

Too many reunions you went to, Steve.

Steve Shields 47:15

Well, I did that. I'm retired from reunions. But Wallace B. Smith was an, I think an absolute visionary for who we could become as a people. He knew that women in the priesthood would be a challenge, and I say women, because I'm putting us back in the context of 1984.

Karin Peter 47:45

Right.

Steve Shields 47:46

And, you know, had he given that document nowadays, it would probably say something different than just women. And we've had to struggle with the LGBT element of ministry and how we, not only how we give ministry to that community, but how we receive ministry from them. But I think it's all in this, in the same model and the same vision of section 156, and the idea of women in the priesthood. He, he was not unthinking about what would happen to many people in the Church. He knew, he knew what would happen. He knew there would be opposition to that. So, he, he didn't want that to be the only focus of 156. He said, there's, this is all, it's an integral part, each of these elements are an integral part of the other. It's a whole, not, not a part. And try as he might, a lot of people took the part only, and just basically ignored the rest, and it's a long document. You take out, even taking out the calls to office, it's a lot of counsel there, and it's a rich expression of, of Enduring Principles, of, of Basic Beliefs. But the focus got shifted to that one element, and I think now, 25, oh, no, how many years on? We're almost 40 years on, aren't we, from '84, 38 years on. We're still dealing with it. We're still dealing with the fallout from that. And so, almost immediately, in 1984, the opposition, which had been growing from the 1960s, it wasn't just suddenly an opposition. There had been a, there was a group in the Church that were really concerned about the *Exploring the Faith* basic beliefs essays...

Karin Peter 49:48

New curriculum.

Steve Shields 49:50

...new curriculum, they called it. And lots of, of lies were told by many about what the new curriculum was, and they were, many of our folks, you know, honored, trustworthy folks who were writing to the new generation, were just persecuted terribly. And Community of Christ has always valued democratic discourse, loyal opposition, of, oh, dear, what's this...

Karin Peter 50:30

Faithful disagreement?

Steve Shields 50:31

Faithful disagreement. Thank you. We valued that, always. But some of the disagreeers went way beyond civil discourse. And I've heard horror stories from men and women who became my mentors and dear friends of how things were done to them in Independence, and, you know, it was just un-Christian. But even though it was un-Christian, we, we chose, as an institution, not to kick them all out of the Church. And in Community of Christ, the one thing you can be kicked out of the Church for is un-Christian-like conduct. You can have your disagreement, you can have your different opinion, you can believe about God differently, but when you start behaving, not as a Christian, you have no part of our community. But we, you look at the statistics, and very few people were kicked out because we value the community. And we, and President Smith, Wallace B. Smith spent countless hundreds of hours going to those people and trying to, you know, be pastoral with them and help them. Okay, so you don't accept it, but can we at least agree to disagree? And even then, he was not successful in, in agreeing

to disagree. In Los Angeles, where I was serving in those years, we had a congregation that would not call women to the priesthood, and our stake president said, "Well, we probably should shut them down and dissolve the congregation." And several of us said, "Well, now, wait a minute. They're not preaching against the Church and what we believe. They just simply aren't sending in calls for women in the priesthood, and many of them are vocal in not accepting that." And me and a couple of others, really worked hard to be pastoral with that group, that congregation. They were our biggest congregation. All of the priesthood members in that congregation were, were tithing filers, and full tithe payers. So even though they disagreed with women in the priesthood, they still paid their tithing. They still, in those days, we have these tithing, tithing forms that we would send, they all would send those in. They were faithful people. And they didn't want women priesthood members to come and preach. It was just difficult for many of them. And I spent a lot of time there, I think probably more than heritage RLDS, Community of Christ folks, because I'd been raised in the LDS Church, I think I understood it in a little different way because I had to come to grips with women in the priesthood too. I'd been raised in a community that said, well, the women can hold the priesthood every night when he comes home from work. And, you know, that's how I was raised. That's how my mother operated, and dad was in charge. And it wasn't bad, it just was. So, when, when 156 came out, I, I had to do some serious, it's like, holy cow, I knew this might be coming, but I didn't expect it, so soon. But so, that was a good example of faithful disagreement in that congregation. Not all people were treated that well by the leadership in our areas. And I'm not criticizing leaders. You do what you think is right at the time, and, you know, if it turns out bad, well, you did your best, and we can't, we have to move on, so. But we had probably around 10,000 active Church members, from between 1984 and 1990, leave the Church and set up several different kinds of configurations of church, not necessarily competing against the other but all the different kinds of opinions and disagreements. You know, this group coalesced around those, this group coalesced around these. You know, there's, there's a whole set of branches of the Church called Restoration Branches that still, you know, 40, almost 40 years on, still exist. They believe we shouldn't organize, we shouldn't choose the apostles, we shouldn't choose a prophet, that someday the one mighty and strong will come and make all this right. Others say no, we need to move on, we need to have a prophet. And there have been several former Community of Christ priesthood members who've become prophets and presidents in three or four different denominational configurations. There's a couple of configurations where they don't have that structure, but people come together in a conference. There's two, two versions of that. The Conference of Restoration Elders has a committee and they get together for fellowship and help for each other. The Joint Conference of Restoration Branches has actually ordained apostles, moved more in the direction of reformatting a denominational structure. There's a lot of those, but it's the same, almost 10,000 people that keep getting divided into smaller and smaller interest groups. And in many cases, their mission is to persuade faithful Community of Christ people that they're wrong, rather than finding people who don't have Christ in their lives, and, you know, trying to share that message and blessing. And that's, I try, you know, in my writing, and in my publications of papers and stuff like that, I try to be objective, but if I were to make one criticism of, of those kinds of groups, it's that they tend to follow the model of the old, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, not the Mormons, where our mission in the 1860s and '70s, and '80s and early 1900s, was to persuade Mormons they were wrong rather than to take Christ to people who didn't have Christ in their lives. Now, somebody say, well because they were Mormons, they didn't have Christ, so, you know, the. Well...

Karin Peter 57:09

That's, yeah, yeah.

Steve Shields 57:10

...we can slice that piece of bread 10 different ways. But I think all of these disruptions; Supreme Directional Control, section 156, have laid the foundation for what now, we're 12, 12, almost 15 years on with the Enduring Principles, that *Sharing in Community of Christ* booklet that we have, where we lay out in very plain to understand language, here are the nine things that make us who we are. Now, we're not the only ones who have those things, and some other groups may not have all nine things but, but, you know, with, you look at the Enduring Principles, and there is an order of how those are listed. There, there's a logical order to the flow. You start with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit is the Trinity, and then you move to, you move from creation through revelation, and you end up with Blessings of Community, which takes us right back to the Trinity, which is a community, a blessed community, and I think that there's just a logical building step process. And when I worked at Church headquarters, in my last assignment, I was really promoting, you know, some people were trying to alphabetize the Enduring Principles. I said, I think we're missing the theological beauty here by alphabetizing them for the sake of making it easy. And you know, there were other voices, well, we still have to have Basic Beliefs, and so we've developed a basic belief statement, and we need both of those. And, as we've gone over the years, we've added the Disciples Generous Response part of it. We've added the missional part of it. But, but all of those pieces, how we're looking at tithing, how we're looking at, you know, Christ's mission is our mission. Our mission is not Christ's mission. Christ is our mission, and you can't reverse that, because that brings in the element of, well, God told me X, Y, Z. Well, if it's not Christ's mission, then it ain't our mission.

Steve Shields 59:31

Of, but all of those, I can see the foundations for those coming over the past 100 years. That's a long time to get foundations built and to move on with that. But more than at any time in our history, and I'm taking us right back to 1820, whenever Joseph had his conversion experience in New York, in Palmyra, till now, I think we're poised with a positive message, a positive image. And I think it's helpful to see where we've been, to understand where we are. And we can look at various things around the Church these days, and it can be discouraging. It's really discouraging to see what's happened to my congregation here in Seoul after we couldn't meet for two years...

Karin Peter 1:00:24

Yeah.

Steve Shields 1:00:25

...but online. COVID just about killed the congregation. Before COVID, we had several dozen people coming to church. When we went online with worship services, initially, those same people were online. But over time, it's like, well, I guess we don't have to go to church. We're gonna go mountain climbing this weekend. And that's a, that's a good pursuit. You can find God and the Holy Spirit in the mountains with, Korea has some beautiful mountains and wonderful trails for hiking, even here in the city of Seoul. You know, just across the street from the church, we've got a mountain and we went, we took church

up to the mountain last Sunday, and we hiked up there and we found a place. We sat, we meditated, we prayed, we shared our news, we had lunch together. It was first century style worship church. So, I don't criticize those people, but over time, you get, suddenly you get out of the habit. So, we look at that and we can be discouraged when we see few people coming back to church in person. But we've got all the tools, we've got the giftedness, we've got the resources, and we just need to, you know, buckle up and hang on for the ride.

Karin Peter 1:01:51

So, with a history of these kinds of schisms, that really do propel us forward in our response to God's call to the Church, you have, you've articulated a lot beyond what happens in the, in the schisms. You've, you've given us wonderful nuggets of other historical ideas and facts in there as well. But as you were preparing to kind of think about this for a lecture for the Historic Sites Foundation, and as you began to, to really look at that, did you discover anything new?

Steve Shields 1:02:33

Well, I've been at this game for almost 50 years. And, you know, in the first edition of my book, I had listed about 150 expressions. I now have almost 500. So yeah, there's a lot of new stuff coming out. In, in the Community of Christ section alone, discovered, for example, and they're not a schism, per se, the, both faithful members of Community of Christ, but two different translations of what we know as the Anthon Transcript, copied by Joseph Smith from the golden plates as the story goes. But these two faithful Church members have come up with a, from a different angle, and have two different translations of that document, each of which is what God told them was right. And so that, you know, that was a more recent discovery. Now, neither of those people are schisms. They don't, you know, that, they're faithful Church members. I don't want to cast any aspersions on their integrity at all, but it's, it's interesting how those kinds of things can happen. And in talking with the president of the Church a few years back, he said, "How do I approach these people? They've, want me to confirm their translations." I said, "But isn't it the purview of the prophet-president of the Church to translate ancient scripture, not rank and file members?" Well, okay, you know, but if you can come up with your ideas, that's fine, and we're not, you know, there's no negative thing about that. That wasn't, one group that emerged in the, in the '70s, before section 156, in Canada, coming out of the Community of Christ tradition ended up as a polygamous group, which, you know, given the history of...

Karin Peter 1:04:43

Yeah, of RLDS/Community of Christ, that's startling.

Steve Shields 1:04:47

It was kind of, was like, how do you get from point A to point B here?

Karin Peter 1:04:51

Yeah, yeah.

Steve Shields 1:04:52

But, you know, they did.

Karin Peter 1:04:54

Interesting.

Steve Shields 1:04:55

So, there's, there's a, but they were a small, localized group, so, you know, the, the larger impact was never felt except in the localized area.

Karin Peter 1:05:05

Oh, sure, sure.

Steve Shields 1:05:06

There were, there was certainly some impact on the, the mission of the Church there.

Karin Peter 1:05:12

So, this has been 50 years, you said, approximately, that you've been really involved in this. So how has it shaped you as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Steve Shields 1:05:24

That's, that's not an easy question to answer because...

Karin Peter 1:05:29

Good. I'm glad it's not a easy questions

Steve Shields 1:05:34

...it doesn't just happen. Shaping, last weekend, I took a group of people to a historic pottery making area of Korea. It's been a center of ceramics for 1000 years. I mean, we're talking, you know, long history. Many of the potters there today are descendants of those first potters 1000 years ago. It stayed, trade stays in the family. Not only do they make utilitarian stuff, but they're also artists. I had the opportunity for the first time in my life to throw clay on a potter's wheel and to shape a dish. Shaping discipleship is like that. And the master potter who was guiding my hands, he said, "Okay, now, now, do this." And he would gently touch my fingers and guide my, you know, said "don't, don't, don't worry. We can reshape that," you know, "We can redo that." And I think in response to the question, it's like, and how often has that image come up in scripture about the potter's wheel, being clay in the potter's hand? That became real for me for the first time in my life. I'm 66 years old, last Saturday, just three days ago, I'd been to this place, I take groups, I do a lot of, of tour escorting with our Royal Asiatic Society, Korea. I take lots of expats, and Koreans too, to places that maybe they've never been before. And so, I've been down to this place dozens of times over the past 30 years. First time ever that I actually did hand, I've guided people to this place, and they've done hands on. I've stood back and enjoyed watching them, but this time, it's like, Steve, come on, get over here and do this. And it was, I can't say it was fun. It was a, was a spiritual experience, almost. So, discipleship; when I was 15 years old, I'd grown up in the LDS Church, I was a good Mormon boy, did everything right. I did everything I was supposed to. I was obedient to my parents. You know, I mean, you know, I was a good kid. I didn't cause them any grief. Well, I caused some grief, but not like some of my friends were causing their parents grief, because I never smoked and drank. And I never did any of that stuff, and I still don't, never have. But

we went to, on a Church history trip, and we ended up in Kirtland, Ohio, went to the temple. And I thought it was pretty bad that this apostate group controlled that building. So, I picked up all their little pieces of literature that, in those days, they were free, you know, you could just take them, and as I'm, we're in the car traveling, and I'm reading, I was so incensed when I read the book about Joseph Smith's first vision, a little booklet. It's like, well, now, wait a minute. They can't have Joseph Smith because we have him, and it was really offensive. It was upsetting. It was the first time that my understanding had been challenged. The tour of Kirtland Temple was cold and devoid of Spirit. It was just an architectural tour, and on this point, I have some disagreements with the Church Historic Sites people about solely an architectural tour. But anyway, I think we've modified that and we can tailor it to our audiences now a little bit better than we did back in the '70s. But, you know, the booklets were all anti-Mormon in nature. And, well, you know, eventually I got over that, got home, threw them in a shoebox, stuffed them in the back of my closet. And a couple of years later, I'm in a Church history class. In the LDS Church education system, it's a, you know, full, you know, every day of the week kind of a class like we would do in high school, and we were supposed to write a term paper. And it's like, oh, gosh, what do I do? What do I do? I was cleaning the closet one day, found these tracts. Oh, I'll write a term paper about how stupid and foolish the RLDS/Community of Christ is, and how apostate they are. And I succeeded very well. All of my teachers in the, in that LDS education system, "Oh, this is great work, Steve. Oh, yeah, you really hit the nail on the head here." Well, that led me to the Church of Christ on the Temple Lot, and eventually a list of other churches. And I soon began to see the history of the Church in a broad way rather than a single-minded, institutional way. I tend to go for the intellectual stuff, rather than spiritual practices stuff. A lot of the spiritual practices have not spoken to me, as well as, you know, pursuing a good solid book on theology, you know, from some interesting scholar and having those conversations with the likes of some of my teachers and mentors in the Church like Geoffry Spencer, and Paul Edwards, and others. So, I began to see that there was not just one story of the Church, there were many. And what I had grown up with was not the only interpretation of the story of the Church. And I don't think my faith was ever shaken in this sense that I gave up on Christianity and all. The faith in the institution that I grew up in was shaken, because in those days, the history of the Church was not very open. It had a very narrow focus, and it was tightly controlled, the story was tightly controlled. And I understand institutions have to have their version of how they're couching their story, but there were things in the history of the Church that were never talked about that when they were discovered, it was faith shattering for many people, because it completely threw out everything they had grown up with. And, but I did that more gradually and it basically led me into RLDS/Community of Christ, which, people ask me why I joined Community of Christ, and it's like, well, I, you know, the wonderful programs they have for all ages, the beautiful buildings they build, and people look at me like, wait a minute, what are you talking about? I said, "Well, that's my point. It's not about the programs. It's not about the buildings. It's about the community that is gathered." And I began to see, really early on in my life with Community of Christ, that what happens on Sunday mornings in the worship hour, is the least important of the activities we do in the community. It's important, but it's being together, and breaking bread after the worship or before. In one congregation I attended in Independence, we'd have an early breakfast, and we'd gather and share the news and have a light breakfast and then do our morning activities on Sunday. It's sitting around the table with those kinds of people that is really what makes Community of Christ who we are; community. And it's a community more than a geographic neighborhood. It's a community more than just the coworkers at the office we work with. It's founded on something much deeper, much richer, and try as I might, I can't get away

from being a spiritual person. Now, I don't maybe express that in gooey terms, always. I tend to be somewhat cynical, in many ways. I have a sarcastic streak that gets me in trouble, even with westerners who understand sarcasm. But it really gets me in trouble in Asia because they say, "Well, now, wait a minute. Do you really mean that or are you being sarcastic?" You know, so, so I tend to maybe come across as not this spiritual giant. But you know, I really, when, when you get, push comes to shove, I walk through the empty sanctuary, and I'll put my hands on the back of a chair where so-and-so usually sits and pray for them. And I don't do this long, lengthy, you know, patriarchal blessing, evangelist blessing, kind of a, you know, sermon, it's just, uh, this person sometimes gets on my nerves, but, but I still love them and I hope they're doing okay. And you know, it's that kind of, it's not vocalized, it's just kind of a thought process. I tried, in my retirement to say, well, I mean, I don't really need to go to church, I can do other things. And I can't. I keep getting pulled back...

Steve Shields 1:15:35

...by God, to the people. After almost two years of being online, I lived about an hour and a half from the church in Seoul, so I had to get up pretty early to get to church on time, well, early for me. I'm not a morning person, I'm a night owl, but I made the effort, and I did. But then we went online, and I didn't, I could sleep for another two hours on Sunday morning. I didn't have to travel the hour and a half. And, frankly, when we're on Zoom, and the little pictures in the corner, you don't know if I've shaved this morning or not. And so, I didn't have to really worry about all of that dressing up. So, when we were able to go back to in person worship a few months ago, I was faced with a pretty difficult decision. I could do Zoom, we were still, we're doing a hybrid, so, you can still log in on Zoom and share with the folks or you can come in person. Because we're back in person, we do lunch after church. It's simple lunch. A couple of the folks go in the kitchen, and they whip up some things together, and, and we sit around the table, and we eat, and we chat, and we wash dishes together and, and then we have a cup of coffee after lunch and sit and chat. And we're not done with, with church, and you know, we start at 10:30 in the morning, none of us leave to go home until three o'clock in the afternoon, because we love being together. So, that first Sunday I had, I said, "Well, I don't know if I want to get up that early to go. It's okay to be on Zoom. I'm not going to set my alarm. If I wake up in time I'll go, if not, that's my sign to stay home and just do Zoom." I was wide awake at 7:30 in the morning, which to me was a sign from God, if you will, that I should go. And, you know, as one of only a couple of non-Koreans in our congregation here in Seoul, as a retired appointee minister, as a high priest, I have a lot of hats that need to be dealt with properly, appropriately. I've tried to stay out of the way of our appointee when we had one here, we don't anymore because it was his show now, not mine. And so, I, you know, I said to him, I said "You, you tell me, ask me, but otherwise, I'm not going to offer my input. It's your show." And he did. He would seek my advice sometimes and you know, I was senior to him and had more experience and we would share quietly and privately together, but I tried to stay out of his way. Some retired appointees don't have an easy time of that. It, it's hard when you've done it all your life and then suddenly you need to sit on the back row. As a high priest, I have responsibilities in the priesthood, but I wasn't going to push that on anybody that, you know, if you want me to preach, you know, ask me once in a while, I'll be happy to do that. But here in Seoul, we need to focus on the local folks and you know, helping them take charge. So, that, that's kind of part of my hesitancy. So, I came that Sunday morning, and I realized that being at church was not just the building or the worship service, it was the people, and I didn't realize how badly I missed being with my community, being with my church folks, my sisters and brothers, and, old and young. And I just, was it God who caused me to wake up that

morning? I'm a little less directed in that kind of regard. You know, it's like, well, if you want to call it God, okay, fine, but for whatever reason, I was awake in time to get ready without rushing. I had plenty of time to, it's a subway ride and a bus ride to get to church and comfortable transportation, but sometimes you wait for the train to come every, you know, we have to wait 10 minutes sometimes for the train to come, and the bus, you sometimes have to wait five minutes for the bus to come, so, there's a few minutes that are lost there. I am so glad that I woke up that morning and began to come back in person. And when I was in the US over the summer for my grandkids' birthdays, and then for the John Whitmer Historical Association Conference, I was gone for a month and I just about dried up and died away because I missed my community. People at Church headquarters that were colleagues that, yes, that's a community there too, but right now, my community is my home congregation in Seoul. And I love my grandkids, I love my family, it was good to be with them, but I missed three Sundays of being with my people here in Seoul and, and fellowshiping with them and, and taking life's journey with them. And so, all of these different expressions of the movement have given me perspective. And it's, I've, as I said earlier, I've tried to be objective when I treat a written commentary about certain movements. I think I've been successful, for the most part, in keeping my opinions out of the way, but I do have opinions. And so, I've internalized those opinions, say, well, I can see how this person did that, you know, because there's precedent, but for me, Community of Christ is where I belong. And it may not be for everybody. It isn't for everybody. Some people belong elsewhere and will find their spiritual fulfillment there. As, as sometimes as, what's the, can't think of the polite word, as rinky-dink some things seem to be, Community of Christ, for me, has been the best place to explore my faith, to express my faith, and I can do it safely without fear of, over, you know, terrible criticism, of saying, "Well, you know, I'm just not sure God's like that." I don't think there's too many in the Church, you know, if I expressed what my thought would, would say, "Well, you're wrong." They would simply respond with, "Well, that's an interesting perspective, because that's not been my experience." You know, and then there's more, now, yeah, will you find criticism somewhere? Yes, but, but mostly, it's a safe place to express faith, and, and it's a safe place to explore faith. And if we are grown up enough, if we have someone with us on the journey for a while, who then feels called to some other place, are we grown up enough to let them go with God's blessing, or are we, oh, no, you can't leave. You can't leave. You got to stay with us. I hope that we can take the mature approach and say, "We're so glad you shared part of your journey with us. Go with God's blessing. Go with our blessing. The door's always open, if you ever want to come back, just to drop in and say 'hi'. You'll never be not a part of this group." So.

Karin Peter 1:23:35

I think, Steve, that's a wonderful blessing that we are learning to offer at this point in our journey. Yeah, absolutely. So, I want to thank you for, again, for getting up early and joining us today. And I want to remind our listeners that we do encourage you to view Steve's lecture on the "Divergent Paths of Community of Christ: The Last 100 Years", as well as all the other fall 2022 lectures and they will be archived at historicsitesfoundation.org. So, for *Project Zion Podcast*, and particularly this series, which is "Cuppa Joe", I'm Karin Peter, your host. Thank you so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 1:24:34

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