

# CuppaJoe|Changes in World Conference|John Wight

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

conference, delegates, councils, orders, quorum, technology, remote sites, parliamentarian, memory, tradition, President

## SPEAKERS

John Wight, Josh Mangelson, Blake Smith

### **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.

### **Blake Smith** 00:28

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast, and what I expect will be a fascinating episode in the Cuppa Joe series. I'm your host, Blake Smith. And today we're going to be focusing on the evolution of World Conference. And who better to have that conversation with and someone who's had a lot of front row seat time for one or two conferences. At least, my guest today is John White Sr. And John is no stranger to Project Zion Podcast. I believe this is his seventh podcast in the guest's seat and will have references to some of those other podcasts in our show notes. John is also a member of the project podcasts team, he helps us out with a transcription process. And I am really appreciative of John's willingness to sit on this side of the podcasts again, and let me pick his brain about World Conference. John, welcome to Project Zion Podcast.

### **John Wight** 01:25

Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here.

### **Blake Smith** 01:28

Now, I know many of our listeners probably already know who you are, but just in case, and we hope to always have new listeners, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?

### **John Wight** 01:38

Sure. I currently reside with my wife, Carol, in Blue Springs, Missouri. We have six children, four grandchildren, and they're scattered all over the US. When you have that many children, you kind of expect them to be scattered. Currently, I am serving as the Senior President of Seventy until the Saturday of World Conference, not sure exactly when this is going to air but I may not be in that position any longer. But currently, in this moment, I am still the Senior President of Seventy. For World Conference, I will be serving as the World Conference parliamentarian.

**Blake Smith** 02:23

That in itself has got to be an incredibly tense role. I can't even imagine.

**John Wight** 02:28

Yes, it is. And we've already I've already been working in this role for about a year and a half or so. So you know, it's not just something that you walk up on the rostrum, the day of the conference starts. So yes.

**Blake Smith** 02:41

And how many conferences have you been in the parliamentarian role?

**John Wight** 02:45

This is my first. So it's definitely stressful.

**Blake Smith** 02:48

That is a huge, huge task. Well, as I mentioned, it's my impression, at least from my years of knowing you that you've had a front row seat at conference for many years, and I guess it's not always an official capacity. Having been the child of an appointee, and then all through the ranks. Employment in the church and now parliamentarian like you said, so can you give us just a little inside scoop as to your journey as it relates to conference?

**John Wight** 03:13

Yeah, how much time do you have? My first actual World Conference was in 1952. Now, I will have to say that I was in my mother's womb for that conference. But I was present. And it was, it was about two and a half weeks after that conference ended, that I was born. As you mentioned, my dad was an appointee. And at that conference, my folks were transferred from San Antonio, Texas, to Columbia, Missouri. And my mother was close enough to delivery that the doctor said "no no, you can't go back because you'll go back and start packing and that would not be a good idea." And so I was actually born in Independence, where conferences held of course, and so that's how far back my experience with conference goes. I feel extremely fortunate to be able to say I have never missed a conference since then. And so I have a lot of memories about conference. Now, speaking of memories, I will tell you and this this is not one of those deeply serious or deeply spiritual things. But probably my first memory of conference happened when I was about six and I was sitting up in the balcony with my grandmother, and I was playing with this one of these little twisty people toys, and I had it on the edge of the balcony. And lo and behold, it fell off the balcony and fell down and hit the brim of a lady's hat right beneath me. And she never knew that it hit. And you know, I'm six years old, and I'm looking at my grandma saying, Grandma, I dropped it, we gotta go get it. And of course, you know, she wouldn't do that. And so I watched it when the service ended, and the lady just walked out with this little toy on her hat. And so that's my very first actual memory of conference.

**Blake Smith** 05:18

Did you try to get your toy back?

**John Wight 05:20**

No, no, no. Long gone, long gone. But seriously, I guess I would have to say that, that another of my great early early memories had to do with people, people, people. You know, suddenly, I was no longer what used to be known as the only RLDS kid. You know, in school, I was the only one. And now all of a sudden, I'm in this place where there are literally 1000s of people, many, many other children and youth my age. And so that's another very special memory for me of early conferences. I guess another one that I would have to lift up because it's still there from very, very early in my life. And that is the flag ceremony at the beginning of conference. That's, that's just one of those very special things. Now, it's done a little bit differently now. It's still very good, but those that those flag ceremonies really are very high in my list of memories. Now, I could keep going on this one topic for a long time. But let me just mention to others that they kind of illustrate what World Conference means to me the kind of memories that that keep going with me, when I was eight years old, are about to be eight, I should say. I was going through the pre baptismal class with a fellow by the name of Adelbert Withy. And he was just a fabulous man, he was a very loving man. And we realized that some of the time that we normally would have spent in class would happen during World Conference. Now, he knew that I wanted to be baptized on my birthday, which is April 30. And he calculated and he said, you know, we need to do some of the classes during World Conference in order for you to be finished in time for your birthday baptism. And so he, you know, he had other stuff to do. But he loved this little boy so much that he arranged to us a house that used to be right behind the Auditorium. And a couple of times during that week, we would go down there, and he would do the classes with me, and then we'd go back up and rejoin the conference. So that's another of those very special memories. Not specifically to do with World Conference, but it for me, it is it's a connection, that really taught me something about caring, you know, a person who cares that much. Now another one, which is, it's very, very vivid. It's like it happened just yesterday. This one was a little bit later, I was 15. Martin Luther King's assassination occurred during conference on April 8, 1968. And I will never forget where I was when I heard that news and ... still gets to me today, Blake. Yeah. Wow. So that's, that's one of those real life things that for me is connected to World Conference in here where we, you know, we, we talk about peace, we talk about the worst of all persons, et cetera, et cetera. And so that's one of those that just stuck in my mind from conference, one of those experiences that probably will never leave me.

**Blake Smith 08:36**

I knew the date of the assassination. I never made the connection that that happened during a World Conference. Of course, I wasn't even in my mother's womb in 1952. I don't want to rub that in. So mine was more like 1964. In my first conference wasn't until till I was in high school. And my favorite memories, were kind of like yours. I really connect with being in that place where you're not the only RLDS youth, for sure, certainly among all those people. And so I spent a lot of my time hanging out with those guys and making friends from all around the world. And I have to admit, we spent a lot of time in the basement of the Mormon Visitor Center watching movies.

**John Wight 09:25**

Yeah, yeah.

**Blake Smith 09:27**

I don't think there was a Youth Service Corps then. So I wasn't. I didn't hang around in the conference chamber all that much, but anyway. So let's get down to our topic here. How has World Conference changed over the years? Certainly, you've had more experience in Conference than I even imagined. So have there been any major changes in bylaws that have impacted the frequency, the organization the selection of delegates, number of delegates, etc. Have we always had delegates? And did we ever just say, "Well, whoever shows up gets to vote."

**John Wight** 10:03

Yeah, and I will admit, upfront, I am not a historian. So I can't absolutely answer that question. In my memory, we've always had delegates. But I do remember hearing that there was a time when we did not elect delegates, but I can't swear to that point to say, I'm not a historian. One of the major changes is in the frequency of the conferences, and it used to be every two years. Now they're every three. And that's a fairly significant change to the way we have done Conference, the number of delegates has pretty much stayed the same, right at 2800. And, and the only requirement for being elected as a delegate is to be a member in good standing that remains in the bylaws stated right there. So you know, that's one of those that hasn't changed at all. And so, you know, there are a lot of things like that, that that remain, have remained, even though we have had some other changes.

**Blake Smith** 11:08

John, you mentioned being a member in good standing. And I know that some of our listeners come from other traditions, what does that mean for us in Community of Christ?

**John Wight** 11:17

Yeah, basically means that you haven't been excommunicated. Put fairly simply, if there is nothing that that excludes you from participation, then you're a member in good standing.

**Blake Smith** 11:31

I know, you're serving currently as a Senior President of Seventy, and have been President of Seventy. How have the orders, quorums, and caucus meetings evolved over the years?

**John Wight** 11:42

Yeah, one of the things that has been really meaningful to me is that there has been attention given to adding language caucuses, and the youth caucus, in my lifetime, to recognize that, you know, we can't just have a delegate caucus, because there are people that speak different languages, and the youth need an opportunity where they don't feel like they can't ask questions or say anything. And so those are some of the changes that have been made to try to involve as many people as possible. In the various quorums, councils, and orders meetings. Certainly, the councils', quorums', and orders' caucuses changed radically with the ordination of women. And that was very significant, you know, going from an all male meeting of quorums councils and orders to having males and females and I think that was extremely meaningful.

**Blake Smith** 12:44

Well, I'm currently a Seventy. So I've been sitting in on the Quorum of Seventy meetings for a number of years now. With the delegate caucus and the the youth caucus, do they allow folks to come in and

watch those? Is that typically done from the balcony like a legislative session? Would other people be able to come in and and just listen to the conversation?

**John Wight** 13:04

Well, as as you say, I've been doing the Seventy stuff for a long time. So I can't say from firsthand experience, but my understanding is that people could go in there and observe or just see how it how it looks. The one thing that has has been a tradition, at least for the quorums, councils, and orders has been if there is a vote to be taken, then you have to be a delegate to to vote in those. But I think, and I can speak from, from the position of a Seventy, we've always let pretty much anybody come in there and observe, you know, we often have had spouses of Seventies come in, and they just know, yep, if there's a vote, I'm not a legal technical member of the council, or the quorum. So you know, I can't really vote. But yeah, we don't have a sergeant at arms that stands at the door and make sure that you're, you know, the right age or you speak the right language or anything like that. So.

**Blake Smith** 14:06

Probably in the Quorum of Seventy, there ought to be a Sergeant at Arms. And now that the US is all one quorum, that's a much larger quorum than in previous years. It was probably easier to manage with the individual quorum, because there were fewer people in each of the meetings, right? So I want to return back to the delegate question. We were talking about things that affected delegates and how were they chosen and who gets to be one. I'm interested to know, has the look of the delegate body changed over the years? I mean, has it become more diverse? Has it become more internationally representative?

**John Wight** 14:49

Yeah, very much. So. There were even though it was not as obvious as it is now there were a number of non US delegates all along through the times that I have been there anyway. But I do remember how that increased noticeably as the efforts to reach into new nations became a major focus of mission in the 60s. And so there were people from other countries suddenly that were there. And so that was, that was a neat look. The French Polynesians had always been there during my time anyway. And so in the colorful clothing, and so forth, that was always a blessing to see that. It's just beautiful. And then suddenly, there were others from other countries, and that has just continued to increase. It's wonderful to see so many from around the world and to have the opportunity to get to know them and their cultures. It is still challenging for people from some areas to get to conference because of problems with visas, and that sort of thing. And this has resulted in a significant change in how we do the voting in some situations. We now use what is called proportional voting, which involves the votes of delegates from certain countries, certain areas. Those votes, counting more than just as one, which would be a parliamentary rule normally, but because the delegates from those areas couldn't get there. And so there might be, it might be a one to 10, or a one to seven ratio. And so the delegates who are here are given a color card that they hold up when the votes are taken. And so their vote instead of counting as one counts as seven, or 10, or whatever it happens to be. And so, you know, that look is different, as well, it's wonderful to see additional people from different places, but that also having the colored cards held up has been a little different look in the in the delegates, and it recognizes again, the worth of persons to say, yep, they can't be there because of visas, or whatever it might be. But we recognize the value of their vote. And so that has been very meaningful to me.

**Blake Smith 17:13**

Can you say a little bit about what the rules are for persons who are currently living in North American continent, who serve as delegates in international delegations. I remember seeing folks that, from my mission center, for instance, that were serving in Africa, how does that happen?

**John Wight 17:33**

That still happens not as often as it used to. And partly because of the proportional voting change, because some of those seats were filled by US people. So the votes could be counted for those people. So it has decreased. But now, again, I'm don't quote me on this one. My understanding, though, is that you don't have to be a member of a certain jurisdiction in order to serve as a delegate. As long as you're voted in as a delegate. That's okay. But, again, that used to happen a lot more than it does now. And I think a lot of it has had to do with the proportional voting.

**Blake Smith 18:18**

Oh, that's great. I was wondering about that. Because I know that this upcoming conference, for instance, my mission Center has someone from another Mission Center, who's joining us because we had some open seats. But what I've really appreciated about the international delegations with the proportional voting is that we're not just putting a lot of white North American folks in those seats, but they can be truly represented by folks from their culture. So that's really, that's really neat. So have the legislative sessions, in your memory, have they changed significantly? The discussions, or has that been pretty much the same?

**John Wight 18:59**

Well, there are some significant changes, I'll name a couple of them. Generally speaking, they have stayed the same with with some variations, but you would still recognize them I think, because we do follow Robert's Rules of Order. And we have a certain set of of guidelines that we use. Probably the biggest change in this regard is to do with the computerized delegate recognition system. That has been a major change through the years. I remember very well the days when delegates would stand and yell out to try to get recognized and you know, the person with the loudest voice would catch the attention of the chair, and then somebody carrying a handheld microphone would come over and hold it before them. And of course, now we have lecterns scattered throughout the conference chamber, and the delegates go and present a card to the lectern operator and and it has on there their badge number and why they are wanting to be put into the system. And that's all computerized, it goes in from the lectern into the computer system. And then that shows up in front of whoever happens to be in the chair. And you know, it shows the list, as they're going to speak for, they're going to speak against, and that way, they can follow the rule of alternates where one person speaks against, and then one person speaks for once person speaks against, and so forth. So it's, it's quieter. No people standing screaming. But it also has helped in how they're able to manage the legislative sessions, knowing what somebody is wanting to do, whether they're going to speak for or against, do they have an amendment that they want to bring up. So that really helps them in their role. Another thing that has come in fairly recently, is the common consent processes. Those have been added for specific questions. They're not used for every single item of legislation, but that process has been used, and I think quite successfully. This involves the delegates sharing and discussion in different ways. And the presidency determines

the exact details of how that's going to happen. And then expressing their level of support rather than just a yay or nay vote. They say I'm, I'm number five, fully supportive. I'm a number one, fully against. And then the numbers in between. So it's just a way of trying to reach common consent through some discussion that doesn't follow the normal debate kinds of rules. And so that's been fairly significant. As that has come into the process. There's a lot more that could be said about that.

**Blake Smith 19:35**

I found it personally helpful, because, you know, as we know, no issue is black and white. It's either for or against, but understanding that there's a spectrum of understanding. One great example of that was when we did the discussion about baptism. And then we took an afternoon and I think they divided the conference chamber up into five different sections. And each one was a different level, from "keep it the way it is" to "recognize every baptism," and it was really powerful to see that in a visual way, how the conference was really not just divided to one side or the other, but all along the spectrum. So that's neat.

**John Wight 21:58**

There are other aspects that have changed as well, let me share just a couple of, of personal things that that don't happen anymore. When I was a kid, the son of an appointee, the function for announcing assignments for appointees and their families, was that they would have the appointee families stand wherever they were in the in the conference chamber. And then they would just start to read and none of us knew what the assignment was going to be. They would just read "Blake Smith is going to be here, and John White is going to be there." And it was rather tense, especially when your last name starts with a W. And so you know, you're down near the bottom of the list. And all of a sudden, in the Cs, for example, you might hear somebody who has been assigned to the place where you are right now.

**Blake Smith 23:43**

And so you're sitting there all you know, is I'm not there.

**John Wight 23:47**

Yeah. Yeah. And, you know, for the kids, especially that was that was pretty tense to, to begin to wonder, gosh, where are we going to be? Am I gonna have to leave the school that I'm in and accustomed to, and that sort of thing that no longer happens that those discussions are held privately with the individuals and but it also, on the one hand, it was tense. On the other hand, something that was good about it was, we would sing as a conference, "I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord," and you know that really implanted something in my heart that has stuck with me to this day, that, you know, it's not really about me and what I want. And so it had, it had its tense, but also valuable moments as part of that. Another one, and again, this, these are just examples. These aren't the only things we could spend hours talking about the specific things that have changed. But once again, that's a personal note for me. I was called to the Office of Seventy in 1982. And the way that was happening at that time was that all the calls to the Office of Seventy were done at World Conference, approved at World Conference. They would have all The all of the people that had been called go up into the choir loft and sit up there, and then when the name was read, that person would stand, and then they'd sit back down, and then they would take the vote. Well, now, those are all done at Mission Center

conferences, which I mean, that's fine. I'm just saying that that was a significant change for me that I saw in how some of the legislation was done. I mean, there was a vote involved in sustaining those calls. And so that, for me, was a fairly significant change when that was made. And I still have that memory of standing up there in the choir loft and having my call considered.

**Blake Smith 25:37**

That had to have some significant impact on you individually. I can imagine, you know, you when you send up in a Mission Center conference, you know, they're okay, these people expect certain things of me, but to do that, at the World Conference level, and be upheld in that way that put some extra pressure, perhaps, which wouldn't be a bad thing, right? So you mentioned the change in the way the appointees were assigned over the years. And I can only imagine the trauma that that would have caused for a lot of young children. And, helps me understand why when I was considering going under appointment, children of former employees begged me not to do it. Luckily for my family, that process changed before I got in that in that position. I want to take a minute and go back to technology, because you mentioned when you're talking about how the delegates, the looks of the delegates and changed and the addition of technology and no longer people having to just stand up and yell out, which I think probably was a blessing to quieter voices who never got heard. And probably not liked too much by those who really enjoyed having the floor a lot of the time. But there's been a number of technology changes, obviously with the lecterns involved, but now we're able to simultaneously do things in multiple languages, not only with translators, but visually on the screens and that kind of thing. Are there any other kind of technology changes you think that might have impacted the conference?

**John Wight 27:25**

Yes, and probably one very exciting thing about this conference is the fact that we will have remote sites that will join by Zoom, there will be delegates at those sites. And there's a whole long list of how the site coordinator will count votes and how they will get into the delegate recognition system. And each site will have three Zoom connections that do different things and, and so the delegates can come and sit before a computer and make their statement or make their motion whatever it happens to be. So that's very exciting. I will say that we actually started considering this quite some time ago, when I was chairing the Conference Organization and Procedures Committee, as it was known at that time, we started looking at this as a possibility. And every time we would research it, we would come back with the same conclusion that we just can't do it. And so, you know, it's kind of exciting to see that now, this year, we're going to actually be doing it. And so you know, that's where the technology has come in. Now, there have been some bumps in the road, and some areas where what was available, ended up not providing everything that was needed. And so there won't be as many remote sites as had been hoped for. But it's, at least at this point, it's scheduled to happen. And so that's a major impact from my perspective anyway. So that people will be able to serve as delegates, even though they can't come to Independence. Another way that technology, I think has affected things is not with the legislative process, so much as with the worship experience, you know, that used to be well, people have been for a while been able to watch the services. But now we're moving to a hybrid system where there will be participants from outside Independence who will join in because of technology, and bring whatever ministry it is that they have been asked to share into that worship experience. I think that's very exciting as well, to utilize this technology in that way so that it's not all coming from here and going out but it's blended together.



**Blake Smith** 29:59

And that's really exciting. If and when you're talking about the sites, I do want to lift that up. I think it's important for our listeners to hear that. That, you know, there are only two remote sites. But that's not because that's all we wanted or perhaps even needed to have. But technology does have its limits. And so it's something that is considered. There's not a favoritism thing going on here. But we're trying to move in a positive direction. I think that's important to hear.

**John Wight** 30:27

Yep, absolutely, I would just say amen to that. Part of it is just simply certain technologies are just not available at the level that they need to be in order to make those connections and be able to hear and see and so forth.

**Blake Smith** 30:47

One other technology thing that I was thinking about is being able to put all of the information digitally (electronically available) for people to read on their tablets, and that kind of thing. So we're not printing hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of bulletins that may or may not get used and that kind of thing. So that's a significant step. I think not only just for convenience, but also in line with our belief in the sacredness of creation. It's a great model for the world church to be utilizing. I'm really appreciative of that.

**John Wight** 31:20

And I would say amen to that as well, Brother.

**Blake Smith** 31:23

What about the way revelation has been received or is received in the church?

**John Wight** 31:28

Yeah, that's a that was a major change. It used to be that handling words of counsel was done at Conference. In other words, nobody would know what was going to be said, it wasn't too long ago, that these were not shared until the beginning of Conference. This always caused anticipation in the minds of people. And I guess some excitement, you could say, and often then caused some very quick maneuvering because of calls into new responsibilities that then would change other forms councils and orders and leadership positions, and that sort of thing. Let me give you a personal example, again, a President of Seventy might have been called to be an Apostle, for example, nobody would know that before conference, except maybe the individual who was sworn to secrecy. And so this would leave a vacancy in the Council of Presidents of Seventy, that then we would have to go and fill very quickly during the week of Conference. So that we didn't leave Conference having a slot on the on the council. Now, the Words of Counsel are normally shared quite some time in advance so that it provides people with time to consider them, pray about them, and so forth. And changes in the leading quorums are generally done through a Letter of Counsel rather than being part of the actual revelation, if you will. And so it's even though it is inspired counsel, it comes in a different way. If you look back in the Doctrine and Covenants, some time ago, well, not that long ago. But there are several references in the actual Doctrine and Covenants that says, and so and so is called to be an apostle or so and so is called

to step down and that sort of thing. Those are not included in those Words of Counsel, they're included in a Letter of Counsel. But all of that kind of stuff was kind of at the last second, and the quorums, councils, and orders would receive an envelope at the beginning of the week, which they were then to open and share with their quorum, council, or order whatever it happens to be, and read it, and then that's the first time that people would know about it. So yes, the process for considering those words of counsel has radically changed through the years.

**Blake Smith** 33:56

So are you saying that the Words of Counsel were shared in the quorum meetings?

**John Wight** 34:02

Yeah. Yeah, just like legislation now is considered in the quorums, councils, orders, caucuses, and so forth. And the calls to different offices are considered in the quorums, councils, orders, etc. before it's brought they before they are brought to the conference chambers. So yes, those were shared in the courtrooms, councils, orders, etc. before they would come to the conference, the body, the Legislative Assembly, so that and then we would have to prepare a letter saying the first Quorum of Seventy or whatever it happens to be voted on this and, you know, then tell what, how they how they voted. So that that would come from each quorum Council order to the World Conference as part of the consideration of those words of council in the Conference session.

**Blake Smith** 34:58

Okay. The reason I asked that is because I seem to remember, at least when I started attending Conference, which would have been late 70s, that it was pretty typical of the President and Prophet of the church to give that revelation at the Sunday night, or the first night of conference, who then there was time to consider that. So that was why I was wondering if that's if there was a time where it was revealed to those courtrooms and orders before even the Conference.

**John Wight** 35:31

Yeah. And and, again, I can't swear to it, I don't know what time frame you're talking about. But I do remember sitting in a room being handed an envelope a sealed envelope as president of Orem of 70. And, you know, we were given instruction of when to open it, how to how to handle it, how to present it, and so forth. And so, yeah, it has been handled differently at different times, for sure.

**Blake Smith** 36:00

Do you think that has to do... I'm just interested, as a point of conversation... does that have to do with leadership style of the President/Prophet? Or do you think or is it more about where we were in in our procedures and the way we understood revelation at the time? Yes, yes. Okay, good.

**John Wight** 36:24

I think probably both of those factors came into play. And my experience, my observation has been that, that some of the Prophet presidents have been more open than others. That's not a judgmental statement. That's just, you know, we all have different ways of dealing with things. So yeah, I think probably both of those factors did play a role.

**Blake Smith** 36:48

I do think from the, from the delegate, or just general church membership perspective, it has been refreshing to have it be open. I know, for instance, President Veazey has said, I'm putting this out there. I'm not asking for you to consider it one way or the other, let it live in the church, and then we'll, we'll decide. And there has been then, before the end of the week, enough feedback to say, Okay, we do need to consider that this week. But that openness to live with it as a church seems to also be really closely in line with the canonical process in general. So it's, I think it's a good thing. Yeah. And I understand, I understand that, you know, times and circumstances have also changed. I think you mentioned the separation out of the Letter of Counsel and the Words of Counsel too I think then that from a scriptural perspective in Doctrine and Covenants that has been helpful. So, how about the look on the rostrum? I've heard stories all along about who gets to sit where and who gets to be on the rostrum? Can you clear up a few of those for us?

**John Wight** 37:58

Well, I will name who is up there, who has been for the last several conferences anyway. Of course, the First Presidency is seated up there. The Council of Twelve members are seated up there, the members of the Presiding Bishopric are on the rostrum. In addition, it would be the President of the High Priest Quorum, the Presiding Evangelist, the Senior President of Seventy, the Church Secretary, and then there are a number of other support staff seated up there, including the Parliamentarian I might add. So yeah, it's an interesting group to see seated up there.

**Blake Smith** 38:47

So can you think of any, any traditions, maybe that were part of conference that we don't observe anymore? Or something that you thought was exciting when it was added as a tradition?

**John Wight** 38:59

Hmm, that is a very good question. There are things that I remember, but not necessarily as a tradition. I'm sure that there are many, if I sat and just thought and thought and thought and thought about them. Some I've already mentioned, like the flag ceremony, and that's different, even though you know, how it's done now is very nice. And I guess one thing that that has always impressed me about the church is that even though we might have what we would call traditions, we, from my perspective, again, we aren't stuck in one way of doing everything. And so some people may think of something as a tradition, but then we may try something else, and it becomes a tradition and then the next time we try something else, and it becomes a tradition. So, you know, there's Words of Counsel in the Doctrine and Covenants just very recently and I can't quote them verbatim, but something about there are there are needs to look for new ways to bring ministry in a changing world. And so I think we've, we've always been that way. I mean, that's why we have continuing revelation is that, you know, we're we may need to change some things. And so, but I'm sure that there are some that people would name that I'm just not thinking of now. I mean, we already talked about how the Words of Counsel were handled, that certainly has changed, and others as well. So

**Blake Smith** 40:30

it's interesting to me to even know what our traditions and what are just the ways we do think they aren't really considered tradition. So one thing that I would think about that I'm not sure it's really a

tradition, but I kind of see it as a tradition and no disrespect to any other choir in the world. But I love when the the Tahitian delegation sings that conference. And that's kind of a tradition I look forward to it. For me, it's a tradition.

**John Wight** 40:55

Yeah, I would agree with that one too.

**Blake Smith** 41:23

So if you could choose one thing that has changed, that you feel has had the most significant impact on Conference or the Church, what would it be?

**John Wight** 41:31

Yeah, this may seem like the obvious answer, but for me, it really is. And that is the ordination of women, for a lot of reasons, not just the visual appearance of people up on the rostrum, for example, even though that's very meaningful, but what having ordained women bring into World Conference has just been incredibly meaningful to me. And so that I, if I had to pick just one, and that's, I think, how you put the question?

**Blake Smith** 42:01

I did. Yes, I did.

**John Wight** 42:03

That's the one that would probably come to my mind first,

**Blake Smith** 42:08

I would absolutely agree with that, if anything added to that. Just the general diversity. Yes. And the change, of look, and participation in the leading quorums of the church has been really exciting for me as well. So now, I don't know if you would feel comfortable saying so you can just say no, I'm not going to answer. But is there anything that you could think of that still needs to change?

**John Wight** 42:35

Yeah, and I've mentioned this already, but the fact that we are moving to hybrid worships, you know, that's great. I think what's done at 2023 is great. But we need to keep working on that. Because we, you know, there is more technology that can be used. And that's, again, not disparaging of anybody or anything that has been done. It's just that that's one of those that we need to keep working on and keep moving with. In fact, President Veazey wrote an article in the *Herald* a couple of years ago that said, we can't give up hybrid worship when the pandemic ends. So we got to keep going. Even back when you know, when we get back to that time, when we're together in the same place, we need to keep going. And so that's kind of where, where I'm coming from there is that if it helps us reach more people, then more power to us to continue to improve that and expand that. You've already alluded to this as well, too, as have I, the whole thing with remote sites, you know, that's something else that we need to keep working on. We I don't think we can just say, Well, we tried it, and we're done. It's something that we do need to keep working on. And again, that's not saying anything against anything or anybody. It's just that that is there. And it's something that we need to keep pursuing.

**Blake Smith 43:53**

Yeah, those are those are great answers. And I would agree with that 100%, i with the idea of, of the hybrid worship, I really liked when the Presidency came out and said that because we could easily look at that as a quick fix for a particular issue when it really was kind of a wake up call to say, here is a way, one of those new ways of ministry that you mentioned that we can reach more and more people. So I really, I'm glad that we're doing that with conferences as well. So John, that's really all that I have in terms of questions, but we'd like to finish every podcast by asking, is there anything else you'd like to share with our listeners that I haven't asked you about today?

**John Wight 44:31**

I probably could have answered some of the questions that you have asked with some of the things that have popped into my mind, but let me just share a couple of them that are kind of meaningful to me and in what may seem like a silly way. You know, we talked about the fact that I am the son of an appointee, and I came to a lot of conferences as the child of an appointee. And that was always fun for a number of reasons. One of which was I got out of school for a week. But the other was it gave us time to see family that we would not see otherwise. And I remember one year, I would have been, I think it would have been about 12 or 14, we were here for Conference. And my uncle and his family were here. And we were all staying in the same place. My cousin Greg, and I, I'm not quite sure how we were able to do this, but we didn't have to go into conference one day. And so we were walking around by where we were staying and walked down to oh you know, a little mini mart, kind of a thing. And as we came out, a policeman pulled up in front of us and got out and said, Boys, why aren't you in school? And, you know, whatever it was 12-14 Whatever it was, I just kind of panicked. And, and I said, Now, I'll tell you that my cousin and his family lived in Lima, Peru at the time. And so you know, in my panic state, I looked at the policeman I said, Well, we're he's from Peru, and I'm from Paris, and we're here for the Conference. Now, when I said, we're, I'm from Paris, Tennessee, I was living in Paris, Tennessee at the time. So that's another one of those fond memories that I have from Conference. Another one, and this may sound really silly, is that I am old enough that I remember when there was no air conditioning in the conference chamber, and it would get pretty uncomfortable in there. So yeah, I also remember very well that, oh, the parking lots around the auditorium were just gravel. And that could be a little challenging to navigate. And, and you know, there were no lines drawn. And so it was kind of kind of a tough situation. Again, these are more silly than anything serious, but they're part of my combined World Conference memory. On a more serious note, I also remember when there was no Temple across the street. And so when we think about that now, it is such a nice, wonderful, meaningful addition to the entire World Conference experience, at least in my humble opinion. And so that would be another one that, that I would lift up and share. And finally, for me on a much more serious note, I always hope that World Conference experience will not be just about us, and what's meaningful to us and our enjoyment. It's my sincere hope that World Conference blesses each one in attendance. Yes, absolutely. But that it also inspires and encourages us to as section 165 puts it in the Doctrine and Covenants. I hope it inspires us to go back and, "lovingly invite others, to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ. opportunities abound in your daily lives, if you choose to see them." And so I really do hope that World Conference is that launching pad, yeah, bless us all that are there. Absolutely. But let's use it as a launching pad to go and spread the gospel even further.

**Blake Smith 48:29**

That is such a great way to wrap this up. So folks, if you're at Conference, or you're heading to Conference, or you're going to go to the next Conference to remember those words, it is a great time to see family and friends and people that you've met. One of the things great things about Community of Christ is that everybody is family. And it's a really neat thing, but it will mean nothing if we don't take it back out into the world. So thanks for that, John. And thank you so much for being with us today as I could spend hours and hours and hours listening to the stories. So thank you for being with us. As I mentioned near the beginning of the podcast for our listeners, this is not John's first time on as a guest of Project Zion Podcast. You can go to Project Zion podcast.org and search for John White to listen to other episodes in which he has participated. One that is particularly relevant to today's episode is episode 169 on common consent, John mentioned common consent in today's episode, and there is a whole episode on that. So I want to just say to all of you who are listening, if you haven't been to World Conference before, try to make that part of your plan because it is an incredible experience. Whether you come from a place that's remote that doesn't have a lot of church members or whether you come from a place with a larger concentration. There's nothing like being in the world community that is World Conference. So I would encourage you to take the opportunity and do that. This is your host Blake Smith and you've been listening to an episode from the cup of joe series of Project Zion Podcast, go out and make the world a better place.

**Josh Mangelson 50:17**

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