

Nice to Matcha | Mareva Arnaud-Tchong

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Mareva Arnaud Tchong, Robin Linkhart

Robin Linkhart 00:27

Hello and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host Robin Linkhart. And today's interview is part of our new series called Nice to Macha where we invite guests to share about themselves and the new ways they are serving in ministry with Community of Christ. Today, our guest is apostle Mareva Arnaud Tchong Hello Mareva. Welcome.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 00:54

Hallo, hallo, everyone. And thank you for welcoming me. I feel really honored to be here and to share with you today.

Robin Linkhart 01:07

Well, thank you so much, and I know it's very early your time in French Polynesia, as we gathered today. So effective World Conference 2023 Mareva now serves as the president of the Council of Twelve apostles. She is the first non-native English speaker to hold that office. But before we launch into hearing all about Mareva's new role, let's get to know her better. Now, I know you've been on before Mareva, but tell us a little bit about you. Where you live, your family, your current field assignment and any other interesting things our folks may want to hear.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 01:50

So, my name is Mareva. And I have a second name French second name is Muriel just in case. I was born into a family of seven children. However, like the culture in French Polynesia, it's customary to be adopted by a close relative. And so I was adopted by my mother's sister, because she was not able to have a child. And so even though I am considered part of the family, the unique aspect of my adoption is that I was legally recognized by my adoptive parents. So that's why I carry the name Tchong, which is my adopted father and mother's name. And what I learned about my adoption when I was eight years old. Before that, I was not aware of that. My parents tried to hide that the best they could. But at one point in my life, they had to let me know. I am a mother of three daughters, a grandmother of four grandchild, and a wife, a spouse, and a daughter of my parents, of course, and both of my parents have passed away with my mother's recent passing three months ago. It's brand new, and I'm still learning how to live in that situation. I live currently on Mo'orea Island. Mo'orea island, just nearby Tahiti island, but I have to often travel between the two islands. And wa la, I summarize most of my little life.

Robin Linkhart 03:59

So Mareva, tell us about your field assignment as a member of the Council of Twelve, the field that you serve.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 04:06

So currently I serve as a member of the Council of Twelve in the field called the Pacific Asia which includes the Pacific and East Asia field. The field includes the four mission centers, the Philippines, Pacific islands with Hawaii, New Zealand and Fiji and New Caledonia, Australia and French Polynesia. This is the assignment that I serve.

Robin Linkhart 04:40

And that is a massive part of the globe.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 04:46

This is a massive part of the globe with a lot of water. I often said i We have a lot of members and a lot of fish too, because there is water everywhere. And then in that field, we have a lot of culture, a lot of languages and different kind of life. So it's really a rich in diversity. It's great and super beautiful. However, it's a challenge to because you have to travel by plane, you can't do otherwise, you can't go by boat just like that. You have to travel by plane and you need to have you have different time zones then. But it's so nice.

Robin Linkhart 05:38

So when did you first start working as an employed minister in Community of Christ.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 05:46

So I began in 1998 as a volunteer, I began by being a receptionist, answering to the phone for the Mission Center at that time. My involvement in the church ministry began in childhood, like a lot of children here, older children in the church, were part of the choir, had roles in reading during worship, and it's required, playing the guitar or ukulele, all these little things that children here did in the past. But I never imagined that I would work for the church one day. But, I went with the young adult group in the World Conference in 1998, and i had an experience which changed completely my life. I felt led to give my time and I quit my job at that time. And I said, with my husband, you work, and I will give our kind of tithing. That's the understanding of that time for the church. And I began to be a receptionist volunteer that year in 1998. After that, I was employed as during that same year as an assistant at the bishops office in at the mission center, where I started officially to work, counting money received from congregations, and making copies of their account statements. And that was the beginning of everything.

Robin Linkhart 07:34

And so what came after that.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 07:37

So after that, I spent few years in that service, it was the first time I saw a computer, I turned on this big computers in the past, you know, like big boxes. And after that Art Smith, came to the French Polynesia

in order to help for the pastoral training. And he stayed, I think, three or four years, and I was his assistant. And when he left, I took the training. We call that pastoral school in French Polynesia. So I led the pastoral school for a few years. And at the same time, I was the president counselor. And when the president took his retirement, I began to serve as the president of the mission center and the financial officer and president of the mission center.

Robin Linkhart 08:44

That is a big job. And then it was from that position that you're called into the Council of Twelve. What year was that?

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 08:56

Oh, it was in 2008 I think.

Robin Linkhart 09:02

2008.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 09:03

I think so the irony is that I was the financial official, and president of the Mission Center, but you know, I need to write all the dates, all the amounts, if not, my memory is not the memory of them. But I need to write everything and when I write it's really okay.

Robin Linkhart 09:27

I understand. So when you growing up Mareva and in your young adult life, did you have any other special interests or hobbies?

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 09:36

Yes, so I was a boogie boarder. Every Sunday after service with the young adults we were in our car and you we all went we all go to the boogie board, you know surfing kind of stuff. I liked that too. Today. I play they'd hit handball when I was younger, because the mission center used to have a sport team basketball, handball and soccer. And so I was in the handball team, and there's something I like to do is really being in the garden and cleaning the garden, can change the plants the place to play the place, I plant the plants, I can change it. That's the other things I like. I like to read too. And, what else?

Robin Linkhart 10:39

That sounds wonderful, lots of dimensions in your life. Well, that brings us to the big reason that we're having this conversation today. And that is this historic moment in the life of the church. The Council of Twelve chose you to serve as the president of our council. I think it would be great to kind of let our listeners understand what that process looks like, how someone is chosen to serve in that role. So would you like to give a little summary of how we do that.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 11:19

So our president, Steve Veazey, is the one calling the Council of Twelve. He's the one organizing the process for, for the election of President of the Council of Twelve and we did this last year, we did anonymously, by voting or choosing electronically. And so we asked the members of the council of

twelve who are the ones who are staying in and who is willing to take that role. And, and the names are in front of the Council of Twelve, and each one has to select the one he's thinking to be the president of the Council of Twelve. So that happened, I think in two or three times, if my memory is good, but you can maybe correct me. And, and I was surprised when Steve said, Oh, you're the one chosen to be the president. So I was thinking, maybe it's not a good idea. Maybe it's a good idea. I don't know. And so I just decided, Okay, let's go. And I will do my best. And that's the way the president of the Council of Twelve was chosen.

Robin Linkhart 12:58

And that was the first time ever that that process took person online. In the past, it's been in-person where the president of the church would come into the council in-person. And I don't know if it's been this way the whole time you were on the council, Mareva. But since I've been on the council, we would do it anonymously on a little piece of paper. Yes. And collect in a basket. So the first round is like nominating what person would you nominate? And then the people that are nominated can accept or decline and then the vote is voting continues until one, and it was different doing it online. It felt different to me. Did it feel different to you?

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 13:49

It was. It was. I remember when I think I lived two times, two times when we choose president of the Council of Twelve. And yes, we were around this round table. And President Veazey came and he shared with us little pieces of paper, and we have a pencil, and we have to write a name and an ABCD on the paper and we give them the paper to Stephen going in a corner of the room. And it was so it was great. It was another way to do that. And we were silenced. And we were just watching and waiting. And he was the one reading all the names counting and turning his chair, coming back to the table, and sharing the results. And yes, this year was different. However. I think that. from my pastor. I felt not, I felt the Spirit. It's not the same way, but I really felt that Spirit when we had to click on a name, because we are encouraged, of course, like every time to pray, to consider, to reflect. And it's not just a click. And that's it, no, it's really a reflection of, of what God is asking us to do. And so it was a great moment too, I think it's historical because it's the first time you're doing this online. Right? So yeah, it's different at the same time, the common thing in the process, yes,

Robin Linkhart 15:45

And the Spirit definitely was in full. I appreciated the space of time that we had, because other than one session where it might, by the time we elect a president and a secretary, it might be a half hour or even maybe an hour. Online, we do each round, and it would be a day or two in between. Yes. And so it was very, it allowed a lot of time for prayer and meditation and reflection in the process.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 16:18

And that makes a difference when you have that time between the two different roles. Because it's really, you go deeper in your, in your, in your choice, in your reflection, so yeah, it's nice.

Robin Linkhart 16:36

Okay, so in addition to being the first non-native English speaker serving as president, you're the only the second woman to serve in this role. So Linda Booth, who served many years, retired in 2019. And Ron Harmon served the four years until you took this role on, of course he was called into the Presiding Bishopric as our presiding bishop. And because of COVID, he actually served four years, we were going to have a World Conference in 2022. So how do you see this new chapter with you as the president of the Council of Twelve, expanding the diversity of the council and changing or impacting things into the future.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 17:27

So the blessing is, comes from the council. I am a servant. But the blessing is really in the council. And I think we have the first Council of Twelve more diverse since the beginning, we are six woman and six women and six men, and most of them are coming from non-American countries. And languages, we still have these languages, Spanish, English, and French. But there are many dialects like enough for Africa or for Spanish to and for Polynesians, we have Tahitian for example. So many, so diverse. And I feel that as a blessing, but at the same time as a challenge because I was not really confident of myself, personally for my own myself, because the system is more US system when I began. And I said yeah, I don't know all the little things I have to know in order to find the information, in order to go deeper to see who are the best person to reach out how to do it. And so that was my concern. But after that I said, you know, it's not the system who is leading us. We are the strategic plan, we are this system. So we are the ones who the system has to follow the Spirit and follow the work of all the council. And that gave me the courage to really say Okay, now it's good. I can, I can do it, but I won't be able to do it by myself. It's not, it's not my style, at least I'm just talking from for me. It's not my style to work on me with one or two persons. I am a team where I work better in teams. And I know that each one of the Council of Twelve has a gift and each one has something to give in the organization in the reflection is not only for what we have to work on, but really about everything, the Council of Twelve has to be involved. That's why we are, we are connected one another. If not, we are not complete. And that's my my way to think. And it gives me a lot of assurance. I'm still learning because all along, the church is really has the simplicity. But, sometimes there are things you really have to know the complexity of different things. And when you're just from outside, it's great even when you're a member of the Council of Twelve, it's super. But when you're in that role, you learn more, and you have to be aware of way more things. And so it's not scary, it's just different. And so by that, I'm happy. I'm happy to serve in that role. And I really trust them in the each manner of the situation. Yeah.

Robin Linkhart 21:20

One of the really exciting things for me as a native English speaker, and being in meetings that have been led by native English speakers, was sitting around the table for the first time and having the meetings led in French. It was, I said it tingles all over my body. And I thought this is this is so cool. And I put on my, you know, translating headset, and I'm sitting there. And I mean, I've been in meetings that have been translated for many, many years, and all languages have been translated. So I definitely have been on the receiving end of the translator. But when the meeting is being conducted in a language that's not yours, it's very different. And so I instantly had a new and deeper understanding of the challenges of being in critically important meetings, and having the majority of the meetings spoken in a language that's not your native language. And I've had a taste of that, because we have people that don't speak English. And as I said, we've had translation. But when 85 percent of the meeting is

not your native language, I was like, deeply, deeply humbled and appreciative of that challenge. So Mareva, you've been in the role not long now. But can you tell us a little bit about what the role of the president of the Council of Twelve looks like, but what your responsibilities are, and I know that you work with a team, too.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 23:02

We so I am first supporter for each apostle. A supporter I think it's important to be as president a supporter reflecting on what are the priorities we have to work on, all the topics we have to take from all over the world from the government, the First Presidency, the presiding bishop, and to put that all together and to reflect on how, and how can we work efficiently with that, on that, and what are the priorities, and organize this in the meetings and reflect on how we can help Council of Twelve to learn more about having information inviting all the people who can be injured if we can enrich the Council of Twelve and put that in meetings or conversations or different things or ways to make decisions to help the Council of Twelve to make decisions or to work on different topics. I am also a part of a group called the corporate body who is a group deciding a few things or reflecting on few things before before other teams, and working in the human resource part of the human resource for international, part of the budget team with the PB (presiding bishopric), of course member of the World Church Finance Board. And, at this time helping the First Presidency, to see if there are ways that Council of Twelve really did this bridge between the Council of Twelve that's not even a bridge, just being kind of represent of the Council of Twelve, sometimes in front of the First Presidency, and Presiding bishopric when it's needed.

Robin Linkhart 24:25

So, in the past, when Ron Harmon and Linda Booth were the president, it seemed like, of course, I think they officed in the Temple. So it seemed like they met often with the First Presidency or the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishop. Has that been a challenge for you to keep that connection, especially with Scott, who's the Director of Field Ministry? So is there like an intentional time that you all do that, because you're either traveling about your field or in Tahiti most of the time, other than when we're in meetings face-to-face? How does that work?

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 26:19

So my meetings are online, because I'm coming to the Temple, where the offices are, at the same time, then all the Council of Twelve. Well, I'm not coming at another time. And so I am really happy that we have this opportunity electronically, online, to do the meetings. And it's the quality is the same. However, there are moments we, we like to be in-person, these moments have to wait and we will meet at Independence. But online is something we are doing a lot now, even in the field even between the Council of Twelve. And with the PB. So it's, it's a good way to, to do our meetings and to talk and, and to take time to reflect on things and to catch news. Yes.

Robin Linkhart 27:29

It's great to know that that's working well for you. And I know, it's a challenge to fit that in, and especially with the time difference that's in the midst of that. And like you, you know, since the pandemic, we've been able to evaluate how online can really enhance our connection. And now that we can be with each other face-to-face, it's really empowered it to have times when we're together person

to person, with our field with our mission centers, as well as the council at 12. And then mix that up with online it seems to be enriching, I think.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 28:08

It is. It is. And, you know, we have these ways where you just choose the language you need, and you have the subtitles, and oh, it's just the way we are doing things today just moving forward. And it makes the communication so easier than in the past.

Robin Linkhart 28:36

is good to know that is good. So this is a lot Mareva How has this brand new chapter in your ongoing adventure with God and with the Church changed things for you?

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 28:52

I am organizing my life differently. Yes, I thought that in the past, we had a crazy life. But now it's still crazy. But I think it's not a secret. I think the organization of the life is essentially spending time with the family, spending time with in the midst of the members where you live, and organizing online meetings in the field and with the Council of Twelve and other meetings. Organizing differently. My life was really important. There are still little things I need to adjust. I recognize because now I'm living not on Tahiti. So that makes it more challenge because I live on an island nearby Tahiti. And most of the activities are Tahiti. So I have to travel often by boat and come back And the airport is there. So if I'm traveling in the field or going into United States, I have to take an airplane here to arrive at a local airplane airport there and just walk a little bit to be at the International Airport with your suitcase. So it's kind of a new life, because a lot of things happen at the same time. However, there's always, I always found a solution and opportunity to do, to try, new things. And so, the organization of the life of my life is really essential. And of course, more concentrates on spirituality, on learning, and time, I called a friend who is a coach asking Okay, you know, I have this now, I, how can we do that, this this, this at the same time, so she gave me little, strategies. So it has to be open to learn, and to adapt, but to learn is essential to at least for me, yeah. And this deep connection with God was, and is a big part of the, of the child of my of my life, because when I see all these, it's not only challenges the blessings too. This connection with God is so precious.

Robin Linkhart 32:00

So Mareva, as you speak of this God connection, and this precious relationship and deep source of life that calls us. How do you sense God calling Community of Christ into the future?

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 32:26

I feel confident about God's plan, or God's will, for the Community of Christ, I'm not sure there is a plan. I leave God doing what God is, has to do. I know that we are called to be the hope for so many in this world, who are not heard, who are heard, who are in a different generation culture. I know that we have a treasure to share. I know that the Community of Christ has a message to give. And so many actions to, to share with, with all the world is, is a great place to live. And there are so many, many places for everyone and everyone has to be to have the same rights everywhere. And it's not the case. It is not the case at all. And we are on the path to reveal, we began to reveal messages through our actions through our decisions, who were not decisions people often approved, supported. But being hands and

hearts of Jesus on this earth is is not an easy and easy task, and call but I know that the Community of Christ has a treasure to share. We can't keep that treasure, that message, that hope, that love, that piece for us, it will be selfish. So, and our actions will make a difference. Our decisions will make the difference.

Robin Linkhart 34:32

So what are your hopes for Community of Christ as you look, even five, maybe ten years from now your hopes?

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 34:42

I hope that we will be, we will continue to raise the rights of everyone. Justice for everyone. That we will continue to be in, to live in the reality and not only kind of a message, an abstract message, but really being action and the church with actions. I will say that our name just, it just the first step sharing the name and, and to be concrete in what to be coherent in what we are saying and what we are doing. And all the people can find in us, in this community, in the community, a place where they can be safe, where they can be heard, where they can be loved, and we can go everywhere and they know that there are people they can be in secure with a community, they can just see how whoever they are, like they are and and have the same rights, the same rights, then everyone in this world can the place where they are warm, we can go there and by our prayers. But if we can do something concrete for them, that will be, that will make a huge difference. We have so many things to do. This kind of changing this world, that can be a topic, but I strongly believe that with our little things will make a little things can be a pivotal transformative experience for for so many. And I'm praying that we will continue to be stronger on that way, on that path.

Robin Linkhart 36:46

So speaking of that hope for raising the rights of everyone and to live in the reality of life, not just speak of it in the abstract. Your French Polynesia Mission Center recently held a national conference. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 37:08

Oh yes. two weekends ago, we had a national conference, we prepared the members and friends here for a long time. And we, the church, accepted to recommend the changes of the policies for the marriage for all that's the way we say that. And for the call of a priesthood of all married people who are in the same sex marriage. And it was a great historical moment, we are the new one here who just concretely decided, and are ready to act for that purpose. So, we have the same.... everyone is in a full participation. It's not fair. Let me just in my opinion, it's not fair that a part of the children of God had full participation and others you know, the other week, we are sharing sacraments, for the sacraments for others, but not for others. And so, we are at that stage, and we the church approved that 80% And it was a good good surprise. We, I felt that we were ready. That 80% was at least for for Essence who are in living on islands where the people will just say swear to you while you're doing this, and we began to members already shared with me their friends or not have the church saying things and they are kind of not hearted but they have to be prepared to answer kindly with love. Because not everyone will understand what we are doing. And so after that change, national conference and also leaders were invited and I was also invited in Colloquy for LGBTQIA2S+, and I am so blessed to be part of this

community. When you hear the suffering of the people when you don't live in, it's different. You when you read when you see in TV on TV, when you when you hear testimony is different, but but when you have them face-to-face, and I'm sharing that testimony, to just say, Thanks, God, for this community who is not claiming, claiming only but doing something for your children. And so yeah, we courageously are returning in that, on that way on that path.

Robin Linkhart 41:03

Yes, that that is a courageous journey. And that represents a long, long walk together with the people, and conversations, deep conversations, and over a long period of time. Very, very courageous.

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 41:23

It is maybe obvious for many who are listening, that it's not less to do that. It is however, according to cultures, it's different when you live in different cultures in different people, especially when you're an Islander. But islands are close and people know everyone. And so they won't hesitate to say their opinion. And and we have to continue to raise the flag of hope, to raise the words of peace, and to be peace. to be peace in the midst of all the things you are saying about us. And we are here for example, we are on TV or on radio so that people are really aware. And so they are still questioning your they don't understand for for few, for others they are even in the church. When I think about a 20 percent my heart is just crying because we need to take care of them to the to affirm that they have their they have their seats, they have their roles in the in the community, whether they are they are not aligned with this decision. And so that's the beauty I think of the community. Everyone is working. Yeah.

Robin Linkhart 43:09

So Mareva, is there anything else you would like to share with us today that I haven't asked you about?

Mareva Arnaud Tchong 43:19

I, I would like us to invite the church to continue to hold nations of the world, every nation, especially the ones and families and the people who are suffering wherever they are to continue to be, to do Jesus mission on earth. There is a call for everyone to participate in that mission. Wherever we are, whoever we are. We have the call to participate in that mission and we need everyone to be part of that mission. I'm thinking about Veazey at this time, the First Presidency, Presiding bishopric. I'm thinking about the Council or Twelve too. And, I'm thinking about all the members, all the leaders, the members, the friends who are everywhere in this world. I know that they are light with where they are and and that light has to continue and they know Community of Christ is a place where they can just be themselves and be safe if they need support or love. So I'm praying that maybe it's too large, but I'm praying that people will know the Community of Christ as a safe place as a family of love. In the community of justice, everyone.

Robin Linkhart 45:34

So, we really appreciate your sharing with us today. Mareva. And the reminder that we, the Community of Christ, leaders, members, friends are called to be the hope, and that we do have a treasure to share and a message to give and that we're called to action, action of peace and justice. That's a wonderful, a wonderful beacon of hope, and call that you have given us today and appreciate your sharing so authentically and vulnerably with us. And, it's a joy to celebrate this historic moment in the life of the

church and to have you represent the Council of Twelve and serve the Council of Twelve as our president. So thank you for being with us today, Mareva. (Yes, Merci beaucoup). And listeners, if you would like to hear more from Mareva, you can check out episode number 611 In our Holy Grounds series, to hear all about Mareva's practices with spiritual formation. And go to the Community of Christ YouTube channel, put Mareva Arnaud Tchong in the search box and it will pull up everything that Mareva has posted there under Community of Christ. And as always a very special thanks to you, our listeners, for spending a portion of your day with us. This is your host Robin Linkhart. And you are listening to Project Zion Podcast. Go out and make the world a better place. Take care bye bye.