

# Nice to Matcha | Leslie Pascua | President of Seventy Designate

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Leslie Pasqua, Community of Christ, Council of Presidents of 70, Philippines, ordination, missionary work, social development, spiritual ministry, World Conference, leadership, faith journey, community support.

## SPEAKERS

Blake Smith, Leslie Pascua

### Blake Smith 00:29

Welcome to Nice to Matcha, a Project Zion Podcast series where we meet new people, new leaders, movers and shakers. I'm your host, Blake Smith, and today I'm here with Leslie Pascua, who has been called to serve in Community of Christ Council of Presidents of 70. If that call is sustained by the quorums of 70 at the 2025 World Conference, Leslie will be set apart at a worship gathering of the joint quorums of 70 at that same Conference. Leslie, it's so good to have you with us today. Thanks for joining us and welcome.

### Leslie Pascua 01:06

Thank you for inviting me for this interview, Blake, it's my pleasure.

### Blake Smith 01:13

You're very welcome. It's really good to get a chance to get to know you myself. I think this is the first time that I've had an opportunity to speak with you. So, it'll do me good to be able to get to know you some. Speaking of that, can you just tell our listeners a little bit about yourself? We're going to ask, going to get to hear a lot of your story today, but I want to give a chance to just a little, get a little bit of background information so our listeners know who they're, who they're listening to.

### Leslie Pascua 01:44

Yeah. My name is Leslie Pascua Junior. I grew up in a far flung rural community with a simple and poor family. My parents are farm laborers, and used to transfer to different places where farm labor is available just to earn money for our daily living. In my elementary school, I used to help my father, because I am the eldest son, usually in farm works and other household chores in a small village, and sometimes I must work so hard to earn, also money that could help my family at the very early age, being the eldest son. So, as I continued my elementary I used to be with them just to help, and I continued my high school at our hometown in Isabella State University, specifically in Cabagan. Isabela, that's the name of the town that I used to stay with the I'm so lucky because they gave me 100% free tuition fees, since I graduated as valedictorian in elementary. So, I was qualified then to enroll in the said University from 1994 to 1998 with 100% free tuition fees.

**Blake Smith** 03:41

That's wonderful. Let me ask you just a couple of quick questions. Leslie, so our listeners understand. What country are you from?

**Leslie Pascua** 03:51

I'm in the Philippines, okay, I'm from the Philippines. Yes.

**Blake Smith** 03:55

Allright, and you mentioned you're talking about elementary school and university. How is the school system organized in Philippines? Like, are there certain grades that are part of ...

**Leslie Pascua** 04:10

Yes, in the Philippines, we have the elementary and the high school, where, in during our time, we only have first year until fourth year. But today we have, they chase it into after grade six. That's the end of the elementary then you have to enter the high school. They say it as the first year high school now changed into grade seven, grade eight until grade 12. That's the high school level, which is divided into two. The Junior High School is grade seven until grade 10, then the Senior High School is grade 11 and grade 12. Job, but in our time, we only have four years in high school,

**Blake Smith** 05:05

okay, and then you went to university.

**Leslie Pascua** 05:08

Yes, I studied High School in the same university until college. [Okay], Yes.

**Blake Smith** 05:16

Well, thanks for that clarification. I just wanted to mention that because I didn't mention where you were from, and I know that there might be some ones wondering about that. Yeah. So yeah, you talked a little bit about your childhood and being in a very poor family and having to work hard from a young age. Yes, at what time was your family or has your family been a part of Community of Christ for your whole life? Or is there a time, [no] you're introduced to the church?

**Leslie Pascua** 05:47

Yeah, my family and even my grandparents, are used. They are very active Catholic families. So I grew up as a Catholic since birth, uh, until my graduation in college, I just learned about the church when I met my wife in university during our college in 1998 she was the one who introduced me the Community of Christ, the then RLDS here in our congregation. So, that's the time I, I was invited by her for several worships events in the local and even in national events of the Mission Center, and, yeah, I learned a lot for four years being guests to the church. Wonderful,

**Blake Smith** 06:53

wonderful. That's a great part of the story. So, you being called to President of 70, was your wife, who was the missionary who invited you and introduced you, that's great. Let's step back just a minute to

the childhood and your growing up in the Catholic Church and in your family. Where did where was God in that and religion for your family? Was that important growing up?

**Leslie Pascua** 07:24

Yeah, even in my early age, from elementary until high school, in elementary until high school, I used to attend the church, a mass, a daily Mass, most of the time, because I stayed with my teacher, and we used to attend the mass every morning, every six o'clock in the morning. So I've been very active in the church when I was in Catholic, but I have this a lot of worries because of the poverty situation of my family, I have always fear in my mind and worries that I cannot finish my studies, but then I was really blessed because I'd never stopped praying. I never stopped believing in God. So, almost every night, I prayed hard, falling tears on my pillows, that God will help me find ways to finish his studies. Because, you know, even I'm a scholarship for those for the university, I should say. I still need money for, for some other needs, not only for the school, for my clothes, for the basic needs that I needed during my schools days. And I'm worried about my family because they earned very limit, limited, you know, money for us to live every day. So, I can say that God really cared for me for those years of hardships, many challenges during my school days until I graduated in college. Because I wonder why many people used to help me. Maybe because they noticed me that I'm really belong to a poor family. I even noticed some of my classmates, my professors, my friends, giving me such clothes, food, allowances, and the government also provided me an allowance, a cash for, for to support me for my studies. So those things are. I really recognize that God really used instruments to let me feel that he really loved me.

**Blake Smith** 10:11

Yeah, that's such a powerful testimony, not only of God working directly in your life, but also the power of community coming together and seeing the need and helping to provide for that. That's wonderful, and I think it's really good for us to hear as well. I know that in my own situation, and for a lot of people in the US context, at least, we take for granted, sometimes the ability to just go to school. Yeah, and so for to hear you talk about praying and desperately and shedding tears about this passion of wanting to continue your education, that's really powerful to share. So, thanks for, thanks for sharing that as well. So, what did you study in university?

**Leslie Pascua** 11:09

I finished up a Bachelor of Science in development, communication, major in development journalism in April, I think 13 2002 that's really the best achievement I ever had, because I asked God that if I will be able to graduate, I want to, to work and to serve for the poor. So, here I am. I was being used by by the church and by God to serve the poor in the way that I can.

**Blake Smith** 11:56

Well bless you and thank you for that. So, in university, you meet the woman who will be your wife, and she introduces you to the church. Talk a little bit about, if you will, your journey in finding the church and joining the church, and perhaps even toward ministry and ordination.

**Leslie Pascua 12:20**

Yeah, in 1998 when my wife started inviting me for worships and even events for the church, I started to have an interest of learning deeper more about the Community of Christ, and I was really comfortable of participating and even helping the congregation and even the Mission Center, allowing myself to be part of the event and to be part of the leadership, even I was not yet baptized. But for four years, of course, I decided to be baptized after my graduation in April. On May 5 2002, I was baptized in bits resort somewhere in Claveria, Cagayan province. That's a different province from my home province. In 2002 But that's after my four years of being very active in the church as a guest. And after almost two years, 2002,3,4,5... in January, 2005 I was called to the Office of an elder. And I remembered that I don't, I did not think even an hour to accept the call, because I have, I have already felt the calling when I was still, when I was still in, in the church, even my college years because I already involved myself deeply for the church. So that started by calling and then since then. But before I was ordained as an elder, I was hired by Community One Resources Development, which is the social development arm of the church, as human development specialist, we can say it as community organizer. So, I was already employed in 2003 for CORD, but I'm not yet an elder. During that time, I was just an elder in 2005 so as I work for CORD, being a field staff, I have been a Volunteer Minister for the church, not only for the home congregation that my wife is staying with, but even to some other congregations where I can travel, where somebody needs my, my support, in case some of the ministers are not available, and I used to be part of the, the priesthood group here in the Philippines for more almost five years as volunteer,

**Blake Smith 15:30**

Wonderful and so then from elder you were called to the Office of 70?

**Leslie Pascua 15:38**

I yeah, as I remembered I was, I am an elder from 2005 until 2019. So, but in 2010 I was transferred my assignment was, I was hired by the church, by the mission center as one of the missionary coordinator here in the Philippines, but since CORD as a non-government organization partnered by the church, have some crisis in manpower and funding. The mission center and the field gave me CORD as one of my assignment, as an additional assignment to lead the operation of CORD. So, in 2010, October 1, I was hired by the church and assigned as field specialist here in the Philippines. And at the same time I was assigned as program coordinator of CORD. So, I work for both social and spiritual ministry since 2010 and about my calling in a 70, I was, my calling was shared to me during the Conference in 2019. I was surprised then. When, when apostle brother Rick Maupin, brother Mark, and other fellow staff here in the Philippines talk to me somewhere in the kitchen at the auditorium. I'm not sure if this is during the lunch time or dinner time, and they shared to me that I have a calling for 70 and we closed the discussion in the same time, and I accepted the call after a few minutes of meditation, reflection and prayer, because I have been, I have been surrendering myself for the service whichever and wherever God is calling me.

**Blake Smith 18:11**

That's, that's wonderful. And so now both, both the call to elder and the call to 70, you gave a pretty quick response,

**Leslie Pascua** 18:19

Yes. That's, I recall, but the proper, but the ordination was happened after few months. I think our World Conference in 2019, is, was happened in summer, a no, April or May. Then I was ordained as 70 in November, 18, 2019.

**Blake Smith** 18:47

Well, it sounds like you were already doing some of the work of the 70. Did you have any sense of doubt or any question, or maybe I'm not sure, or was it a real good fit from right from the beginning?

**Leslie Pascua** 19:16

I have always some worries and, and questions on my part as I continue my ministries, both on social and spiritual ministry. You know, I, I did not finish any theological course, aside from attending such short courses, seminars, workshops, trainings, those are short term and I aside from my actual experiences in doing such uh, ministries and Sacraments. I think I still need more and in-depth studies that could help me more effective and more equipped. Because, as I was called into the president of 70, I felt like it's overwhelming, because, you know, when I will be exposed to other countries for our mission field, it's a different culture. It's a different way of meeting people. It's a different way of understanding, a different culture and perception, and diverse, you know, language and backgrounds, so I need to learn more and more for this role.

**Blake Smith** 21:11

Well, it sounds like you're always ready to serve. I'm wondering about this latest call to the presidents of 70. Was that a similar experience in terms of God's confirmation to you? How did that take place for you?

**Leslie Pascua** 21:30

It's a little bit different. Yeah, as I continue my ministries, being the Mission Center staff and CORD director, I was surprised. Then when sister Karin and Brother Scott sent me in an email and wanted to talk to me, I asked, why?

**Blake Smith** 21:56

But what have I done?

**Leslie Pascua** 21:59

Yeah, one of those questions, one of those reasons I asked, Why is, what did I say? Is there anything that I did wrong? So, so I sent an email back to them, and I said, why? Then I, I answered them to set and schedule, and we set a meeting. Then we, we set a online meeting with with Karin and Brother Scott, and I was deeply emotional when they both informed me about the call to be a president of 70, because I never expect this call, because I knew that this role is not only in the Philippines, [right] Yeah, because it's, it's, it's another big role in the future. And I said, Oh, wait. I said, that's the time I have fear and worries. I asked them to give me, I think, two weeks.

**Blake Smith** 23:17

That's a lot of time for you [Yeah], in responding.

**Leslie Pascua** 23:23

Yeah, because, you know, I have roles here in the Philippines, being the leader of CORD's operation in social development work and being a staff member here in the Philippines. You know, we are very few full time staff here in the Philippines. We are only three at the moment. So, if I accept this, how is my role in the Philippines? So I ask Sister Karin and Brother Scott that I'm not sure if this is a condition or agreement. So, I want to ensure that my role here in the Philippines will not be, you know, I cannot leave it immediately, because you, they know the situation here in the Philippines. They know the situation of CORD operation. So, I'm happy that they, they assured that they will not pull me out totally here abruptly. So, as I understand, there is a very proper transition and transition period, and I will continue to, to make sure that my roles here and my, and our church here in the Philippines and the operation of CORD will not be affected as I, as I participate the quorum in our field. So, they are very supportive. And we talk a lot with my wife, because she is my partner here, and I thank her, because she's very supportive that this is your call. This is your call, and I support you. So I thank, I thank her for always supporting me. And it's, it's because of her. I am here, she, she was the one I invited me for the church. So I thank my wife too for always supporting me.

**Leslie Pascua** 25:50

Yeah, my wife actually is, say, a born church member. Her father, her father was a long been pastor here in Tomaini, in our home congregation for more than 20 years. Their grandparents are the original members of the Church here in Isabella province, one of the oldest members of the church. They started in the church, 1968 I think.

**Blake Smith** 25:50

Yeah, there is, is no doubt, for those of us who are in full-time ministry positions and also married or have a partner that the support of that individual is so, so important to our ministry. You, you, you know, coming up in the Catholic Church, and, and my wife was raised Catholic, and she sometimes will say, you know, there's a reason, maybe there's a reason why Catholic priests aren't allowed to get married, because there's so much required of them, so it makes it so much more important for our spouses or our partners to be supportive of that, not only so that we can go and do, but they are the ones who know us the best, right? And so if they are supportive of our call, it is, it is affirming that we are doing what God is calling us to do. So... So you're filling some big shoes as well, and following along in what the family has started?

**Leslie Pascua** 27:35

Yeah, and up to now, the whole family, the whole clan, here are you? Are, are the main, the main families that that really composed of the congregation. Yeah, here, yeah.

**Blake Smith** 27:51

So I'm also glad to hear that Karin and Brother Scott were supportive of your needs there in the Philippines. I would have been incredibly surprised if they were not, because I'm sure that they

understand how critical that work is and how much you have brought to that so it's good to hear. And I'm sure that the people there are appreciative not to be just left without because of your role. So...

**Leslie Pascua 28:22**

Yeah, I always, since January, I started talking with some congregations that I used to visit that in few, maybe in the near future, a year or two or three years from now, there will be a changes on my role and, and started this year, I have some schedules, I said, and I started to explain them, the possibilities in the future that there will be a changes on how we work together, how often they see me in, in person, and I encourage them also to prepare to form a local leadership team. Because, you know, giving some opportunities for the people sometimes give them space to discover themselves too.

**Blake Smith 29:25**

Yes, yes, right. So, will you be at the World Conference in Independence, or will you be at one of the remote sites?

**Leslie Pascua 29:35**

I will be in a, in a World Conference. I hope that my wife will be getting a temporary visit visa for the World Conference. She will be having an interview on April 29 and 30 at the US Embassy, if she will be a. Uh, given a visa, she will travel with me for World Conference.

**Blake Smith 30:08**

That will be wonderful. Yeah, we pray. We will hold her in prayer during that time that that interview will go well and she will be able to get the visa that would be that would be a blessing to be able to be with you at Conference for this very special occasion.

**Leslie Pascua 30:26**

Yeah, I was able to attend the Conference in since 2016 until 2023 and I even attended International Peace Colloquy sometime in 2014 Yeah, and in Temple,

**Blake Smith 30:51**

Very good. Would you have been at the International writers conference that was scheduled back earlier this year?

**Leslie Pascua 30:58**

I will be here, because the venue will be in the Philippines.

**Blake Smith 31:03**

It will be for, so they're, I understand that they are rescheduling.

**Leslie Pascua 31:07**

Yes, I think it is February 2026, here in the Philippines. So we hope that it will be true, yeah,

**Blake Smith 31:17**



Hopefully the weather will be better. We were very concerned about what was taking place in the Philippines during that time, just last year.

**Leslie Pascua** 31:27

Yeah, most of the time...

**Blake Smith** 31:28

I was really looking for it. Yes, it would have been my first time to the Philippines. So, [oh yes], I'm hoping I would get to... I will be there, if possible, even next time, we'll see if, if everything works out. So, yeah, I was really looking forward to that. So Leslie, what are your, what are your hopes for Community of Christ, whether it be for the world church or for there in the Philippines, what are your hopes for the church?

**Leslie Pascua** 32:02

For the global church. As I see many passionate leaders around the world, I see hope in them. I see hope in us. And I, when I used to visit small villages. Hope is also there in every village. The hope is in every place. Every time I visit in village and congregation to do both social and spiritual ministry, I see people who have full of hopes, aspirations in life and courage to face poverty, both spiritual and material poverty. I, we just need to deepen our intervention and integration to these villages, to be able to hear their cries, their needs, about spiritual and material needs. Hope is, I think, is everywhere as, as I see, there were many potential people that could help us spreading the good news. And I'm very happy that I'm one of those people who are willing to be sent to anywhere, to some places that were that God is, is calling us.

**Blake Smith** 33:42

Well, having had the chance to spend a little time speaking with you, I too am happy that you have been called in these ways and that you have said yes, and you, you have such a message of inspiration and hope as well, and that is greatly needed in our world as well as in our church. So, thank you for that. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to share about your story, or about your call or or anything?

**Leslie Pascua** 34:13

I think that's enough. I am. Maybe I just want to share that I am still, working with the government as a volunteer being a member of the Council for non-government organization sector, under the supervision of the national anti-poverty commission. This commission is under the Office of the President. So, this is a very interesting connection of court to the government, that court is being recognized as one of the partners of government in fighting poverty here in the Philippines. So, I am very thankful also for all of these opportunities that I am in the church, and I was assigned in court, and I grew up very well in the church, both emotional, spiritual, personal and professional growing. And I'm very thankful that I am here with the church, with this family, with the global church, meeting those people who are very inspiring. And with you. I'm thankful that You have given me this opportunity to share. I have lot of stories, but you know, all our address, it's not the one book is it's not enough. I yeah, I am humbly honored and willing to share and serve on my personal capacity. All I can ask is just pray. Pray for me. May our Almighty God allow His Spirit to guide me and use me in ways I can be. As you



know, as Isaiah said in chapter 41 verse 10, do not be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. So I'm not, I have many limitations, but I believe that God have called me because he knows what I can share. And I am, I am here. Yeah, thank you,

**Blake Smith** 36:51

Sure, go ahead.

**Leslie Pascua** 36:53

yeah, and then thank you too for this opportunity. Oh,

**Blake Smith** 36:56

you are very welcome. Thank you so much for being with us. I was going to say that, as you were talking about that, I have a pastor here in my area who says, often tells her congregation, if God calls you to it, God will see you through it. And yes, that's a great motto to have. It sounds like you have a good sense of that. And I'm really looking forward to meeting you in person, Leslie at conference, and hopefully, if I get a chance to meet your wife, I will thank her for introducing you to the church and doing so. I'm sure that the two of you together are doing some great things, but thank you for taking the time to do this. And I know you...

**Leslie Pascua** 37:38

Thank you too. I will tell her that.

**Blake Smith** 37:45

All right, I'll be in the Quorum of 70, so I'll be watching. I also want to thank our listeners for joining us here at Project Zion Podcast, and this particular episode of Nice to Matcha, we've had a great conversation with Leslie Pasqua, who is been called to the presidents of 70 and Community of Christ. And again, if that is approved at the World Conference in 2025 he will join the Council of the Presidents of 70 if you want to hear some other stories or meet other leaders who are taking on new leadership roles at Community of Christ, the 2025 World Conference. Check out our nice to matcha series at [projectzionpodcast.org](https://projectzionpodcast.org). You can find the link in the show notes for this episode, as always, a very special thanks to all of you our listeners for joining us here at Project Zion. This is your host, Blake Smith and you are Listening to Project Zion Podcast. Have a blessed day.